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トモセシュンサク
TOMOSE SHUNSAKU

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実力
至上主義
の教室へ

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のきょうしつへ



Youkoso Jitsuryoku Shijou Shugi no Kyoushitsu e

Welcome to the Classroom of the Know-It-Alls

vol.3

by Kinugasa Syohgo

[Novel Updates](#)

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Prologue: Chiyabashira Sae's Monologue

There are many stories in Greek Mythology that include human suspicions, hatred and jealousy. Have you ever heard about Icarus' wings? Here a simple summary of it.

Once, in Greece, there was a great inventor called Daedalus. Daedalus was ordered by King Minos to build a labyrinth where the monster Minotaur would have been confined.

However, later, he was forsaken by King Minos and ended up being confined in a tower together with his son Icarus. Daedalus, to escape from the tower in which they were imprisoned, managed to gather all the birds' feathers he could find, so that he could fabricate bigger wings. The big feathers were fastened with threads, while the small ones with wax.

Soon, the wings were completed and at the request of the son who asked him when they could fly away freely, Daedalus, as a father, warned him: "If you fly too high, the wings that are reinforced with wax will be burnt by the sun and they will melt. Be careful!".

Icarus, who received such a precious advice, flew away from the tower with his father. Then came the Freedom. But freedom, on some occasions, is a dangerous thing because it makes one lose sight of his own self.

With liberty spreading out before his eyes, Icarus became intoxicated by it. Maybe it was inevitable. It was like a breakthrough from a painful, restrained situation.

Completely fascinated by freedom, he forgot his father's advice and flew higher and higher. The wing crafted as one of a fake angel was burnt by the sun and the wax melted out in a twinkling of an eye.

Eventually, the false wings were burned out completely. Icarus fell into the ocean and died.

Was Icarus simply a brave man who jumped up in the sky to gain freedom? Or was he an arrogant man who believed he could have reached the sun and just overestimated his own power and capacities? Maybe, except for his own father, no one will ever know.

Now, I don't know why I was reminded of Icarus' wings when I found myself in front of a particular boy. Comparing this to various situations, I felt that he's none other than the closest to that figure. Though, right away I'm made acutely aware that they were both radically different. Because this boy didn't have the courage nor the arrogance of Icarus.

I was being pressured. I had no other choice but to do this.

There was no other way to deal with it, but to incur the boy's displeasure.

I couldn't do anything but to behave firmly and with courage towards the boy who turned his quiet anger in front of me.

I cannot restore a rolled dice to its original position.

Because the bet already started.

Chapter 1: The Boundary Line Between Heaven And Hell

The everlasting summer sea. The boundless blue sky. Perfectly clear air. The rustling of the salty sea breeze that gently wraps around the body.

Here, in the heart of the Pacific Ocean without feeling the sweltering midsummer heat.

Yes, this is really a Sea Paradise.

"OHHHHHH! This is the best
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

From the deck of a luxury liner loudly rang the screams of Ike Kanji who stood with both hands raised. Usually, complaints and phrases like "SHUT UP!" came flying from nowhere, but today of all days there was nothing and everyone finally enjoyed a blissful moment. There was a remarkable view from the best place on the deck in the reserved seats.

"What a fantastic view! I'm really super excited!!!!"

A group of girls led by Karuizawa showed up from the inboard compartments. She pointed at the ocean and with a ear-to-ear grin said: "Really, what a terrible scenery..."

Kushida Kikyō, one of the girls of the group idling about, was also ecstatic and was sighing while looking at the sea.

After overwhelming hardships, the midterm and the finals we finally welcomed summer vacation. It was waiting for us with open arms.

Koudo Ikusei Senior High School had organized for us a luxurious two-week trip. A cruise on a luxury liner.

"I'm glad I didn't leave school, Ken. If this trip was an ordinary trip, it would've been definitely impossible for me. How does it feel to be someone on the verge

of being kicked out, who was in the last place even in the final exam? Tell me, how does it feel?"

Even if this question was instigated by Yamauchi Haruki, Sudō Ken,

far from looking blue, just howled with laughter. The fierce and cool appearance of the lone wolf merged completely into the laughing classmate's figure. "It's all a piece of cake if I depend on my skills. Didn't they say I could show my ability of playing the leading role to resolve everything with my intellect

?"

Despite being in agony only some time ago, this trip seems to have completely blown everything away. It surely seems like this blue sea washes away all the usual troublesome things and the difficult situations.

"I never would've dreamed I could be part of such a luxurious trip. And it's 2 weeks, 2 WEEKS. When mom and dad will hear it, they will be so surprised that they will piss in their pants".

As Sudō said, from an ordinary person's point of view, this is a non-standard trip. In this high school, supported by the country, there's really no need to pay for miscellaneous expenses or tuition. And naturally, even for this trip. It's all special treatment.

And needless to say, the exterior of the liner we boarded and the facilities were also very fulfilling. From a first class restaurant and the theater where you can enjoy plays or live performance, to a classy spa fully equipped of anything. If I ever thought of travelling as an individual here, I would need to spend 100.000 yen in the off-season.

Finally, such a marvellous and commended trip starts today.

The schedule will go on like this.

In the first week, we're going to make the most of our summer vacation by staying at a pension built on a desert island.

Then, the following week we're going to sojourn on the cruise boat. At 5 am, the first year students will take the bus simultaneously and head towards Tokyo

Bay, then the passenger ship will leave from the port where the students boarded.

While eating breakfast in the liner's lounge, the students could behave as they pleased. Additionally, a very fortunate thing was that all the facilities on the ship could be used free of charge. For us, usually worried about points of shortage and expenses, this was a life-saver.

Suddenly, Kushida turned towards me and gave me a thoughtful look. Backed by the ocean and the blue sky, Kushida looked even more shining and I don't know why but my heart pounded, despite being ugly.

Impossible, it can't be that she...towards me.

"Well then, how about Horikita-san? Aren't you always together?"

I couldn't allow myself to be captured in the haze of her vision. It seems like she was simply thinking about Horikita.

"Come on, now. I'm not her guardian..."

I can't remember seeing her on board after breakfast.

"You don't seem much of a person who enjoys travelling, are you more like one who enjoys staying in the room?"

"I guess so"

"Around noon we can go on the private beach of the island and swim freely. I can't wait!!"

It seems like this school owns a small island in the south, and we're heading there now.

"Attention to all the students! Please gather on the deck. You'll be able to see the island soon. For a while, you will be able to see a very meaningful and splendid scenery". This curious announcement suddenly reverberated throughout the ship. Kushida and the others paid attention to it and calmly seemed to be looking forward to what was to come.

A few minutes after several students started to gather, the island appeared.

Ike let out a whoop of joy. The students noticed it and they began to cluster

on the deck all at once. When a whole mass of people crowded the place, some bossy students came to push us so that they could take our place on the best position.

“Ah so bothersome...Hey, get out of the way! You rejects!”

In that moment, one of the very intimidating boys thrust away my shoulder. In a sudden fluster, I grabbed the balustrade of the deck to avoid losing balance and falling. Those students laughed at me in disdain.

“Hey you, what the fuck are you doing?”

Sudō

became extremely upset and intimidated on the spot. Kushida, worried by the situation, came beside me. Another girl who followed behind that student and saw the scene actually had a very miserable aspect.

“You should understand this schools’ system. It’s a school based on merit. There are no human rights in class D. ‘Defectives’ have to behave obediently and submissively, like the rejects they are. This side, we’re all class A”.

The D class then departed from the bow (of the boat) like they had been kicked out. Sudō

seemed displeased, still he didn’t give in to a fight and was able to endure with it, which proved that he was becoming a little more grown-up. Or was it simply because he understood and accepted class D’s inferior position?

“Hey everyone, you were all here. What happened?”

Among the students who came flocking, one boy called out to me.

Although we sensed that the situation was displeasing and unfair, there was no need to have unnecessary worries. So better to pay no heed to it.

That boy’s name was Yōsuke Hirata. Class D’s Leader.

I’m also the leader of the group to which I belong.

The rooms’ allocation in groups was about to be decided in that moment. While I was just expecting not to be called by Ike and Sudō to whom I was

relatively close, the group simply ended up in over capacity.

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ust when I remained alone, the entrance of Hirata kind of like a Messiah settled the situation.

“Say Hirata, how far did you get with Karuizawa?”

Ike addressed Hirata who actually never tried to get closer to Karuizawa.

“Why don’t you take the chance of this long-awaited trip and try to be more flirty with her

?”

He poked fun like that, having also heard that Hirata hates when other girls look at him.

“We just go to our own pace, huh sorry. I’ll be going now. Miyake-kun seems to be in trouble”.

His mobile rang and Hirata went back to the ship while fiddling. Busy is the destiny for

popular people.

“What’s with him? Is he really only worried about his classmates?”

“But Karuizawa is Karuizawa, and apparently they’ve not been much close recently so...perhaps...they’ve broken up? If it’s like that, then it sucks. Kushida-chan will have much more competition”.

Certainly, they could be less close compared to when they started dating. But I don’t feel like they’ve fought or the situation has got uglier. Because indeed they seem to get along well when I see them talking.

“I’ve decided Haruki. I...will confess to Kushida-chan on this trip”

“Well, what the fuck. If she dumps you Ike, it’s gonna be incredibly awkward. Will it be okay??”

“This is only for my selfish reasoning. In any case, isn’t Kushida-chan very cute? That’s why I think most of the boys want to ask her out. However, as she’s out of my and their league, and she’s not used to confessions I’m sure that there’s a possibility that Kushida-chan’s heart will be shaken by my sudden love

confession. But there's only a little hope there".

"I see...you made up your mind already.."

"Ah...yeah"

Yamauchi wanted to burst into opposition about that, but he did nothing. He was looking over the deck restlessly as if he was searching for something.

"What's the matter?"

"Ahhh, no nothing..."

After ignoring me absent-mindedly like that, in the end Yamauchi didn't touch the Kushida subject anymore.

"Hey hey Kushida-chan. You got a minute?"

"Uhm? What is it?"

Ike immediately approached Kushida who was calmly looking over the sea nearby. Obviously, that was a suspicious move.

"Well...how shall I say...Hasn't been about 4 months since we met? That's why, before long I wonder if it's okay to call you by your first name. You see, it sounds cold and distant when I call you by your last name".

"Now that you mention it, Yamauchi-kun called me by my name before I realized it"

"Eh, I guess it's bad if I call you Kikyō-chan, after all".

Ike exclaimed a bit deflated but Kushida beamed nonchalantly.

"Of course, there's no problem with it! Should I call you Kanji-kun too?"

"UUUUUUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH KIKYO-CHAN AAAAAAAAHHHHHHH"

Ike cried out and screamed assuming a pose of one who was going towards heaven or of someone who just received a package with Platoon the Movie.

Kushida laughed softly. I guess she saw him as strange and funny.

"First names uh?...come to think of it, what is Horikita's first name?"

Sudō naturally asks me if I know it.

"It's Tomiko. Horikita Tomiko."

"Mhm Tomiko...it's a cute name. As expected, the feeling is perfect."

"Ah no, I was wrong. It was Suzune"

"You little...do not make more mistakes. Suzune uh? It feels perfect like Tomiko, but 100 millions times more"

Whether Horikita's name is Sadako or Sam, it would be selfish to *feel it* or *say it* without permission.

"During this summer vacation, I will also call you by your first name. Suzune, Suzune..."

Well, it seems like the boys want to get closer to the girls during this vacation.

Meanwhile, none of the boys calls me by my first name nor I call them with theirs.

"That's right. Hey look here, Ayanokoji. You made me try practicing. Now you practice saying Suzune's name too"

"Practice? Why? Practice, you say...That's not normal".

You can't do something like practicing saying a person's name... unless you do it before the person himself.

Don't tell me that the simple-minded Sudō intends to make me out to be an imaginary Horikita.

He was staring at me intensely.

Probably because he's imagining the opposite sex, but that gaze is awfully gross.

"Say, Horikita, you got a minute? I need to talk to you a little"

"I'm not Horikita"

I became immediately disgusted and turned away with a face of disapproval.

"YOU IDIOT! It's practice. I also don't want to do it, but it's necessary for me, mhm maybe or maybe not. Because if I don't practice I can't be good. It's important I give it a shot either way."

I really don't want to hear such a horseshit talk.

Ahhh, since it can't be helped, I'll just go along with it and be patient.

"Horikita. It isn't strange that we're always treating each other as strangers? We've been acquainted for a long time. And it seems like others are calling each other nicely with their first name. How about we do it too soon.... gradually?"

[.....]

Unconsciously, I wanted to hit Sudō's head so much. But I endured it with patience and mentally just like an adult would do. Just like an adult would do.

"Say something! Why are you not practicing with me?"

"No, no...What do you want me to say?"

"Just something that Horikita is likely to reply. Since you've known her for a long time, you must know what she'd say, right?"

Our level of acquaintance is 4 months, so it's impossible for me to know such things.

Even so, Sudō insisted that I played the part of an imaginary Horikita. I clenched my fist unconsciously as to threaten someone.

"I'm one step from becoming an adult and I should do something like this on behalf of Horikita? Feel free to practice by yourself"

Instead, Ike acted as a substitute.

While looking a bit shady, Sudō said: "Horikita...is it okay if I call you with your first name?"

"Um well...Sudō-kun is not really a handsome guy, isn't he? I mean, it seems like he doesn't have much money either. He isn't really my type, can't you see? I mean, sorry sorry, isn't he an outcast?! "

Ike was acting as a gyaru (t/n: a woman adhering to a fashion trend usually marked by brown or blond-dyed hair, gaudy clothes and accessories) high school student who, on the contrary, looked nothing as such. So Sudō, even while being on the deck, decided to chokehold him and making him writhe in

agony.

They're always full of vitality, these fellows. Just by looking at them, the fatigue builds up and accumulate. Still, it seems funny.

After a while, all around the gasps grew louder.

The students' enthusiasm also increased greatly when the island could be clearly visible to the naked eye and the distance shortened more and more. I thought the ship was directed to the island, but I don't know why we passed through the pier and the ship began encircling around the island. The area lent by the country to manage the island is 0.5 km. The highest altitude is 230m. It's a very tiny island if seen from the perspective of Japan's totality as a country, but if seen by a hundred and a dozen people on a cruise like us, it was even too big.

Somehow, the liner circumnavigated the island and showed it entirely. It continued to go round and round the outer perimeter without changing speed. Although the ship barely made a splash of water, it actually navigated at an unnatural high

“It’s a very mysterious sight... I’m impressed. Don’t you think so, Ayanokoji-kun?”

“Oh? hmm yeah true.”

I looked at Kushida whose eyes were shining while looking at the desert island, and my heart pounded a little. Again. After all, Kushida was really cute. I wanted to protect that smile and that child-like behaviour.

“From here, we will land on an uninhabited island owned by the school. Students should change into their jerseys, check their prescribed bags and luggage properly and don’t forget to bring out their mobile phone. After that, please assemble on the deck. Please keep all your personal belongings in your rooms. Since there’s a possibility that you won’t be able to go to the toilet for some time, please settle it properly now.”

This announcement rolled around. Apparently, the docking point on the private beach is near. It seems like Ike and the others are going back to change

with high spirits. I also turned my feet back to the group room. Then I dressed myself in a jersey I used during physical education class, returned to the deck and waited for the boat to reach the island. As we drew closer to the island which was directly ahead, the enthusiasm of first-year students reached its peak.

“From this point onward, starting from the students of class A, we’ll begin to descend in order. Moreover, it’s forbidden to bring mobile phones on the island. So please, hand them over individually to your homeroom teacher and go down the ship”. With the teacher’s voice on the loudspeaker, the students went down the stairs of the ship in order.

“Whew, please hurry up! Even though we’re thinly dressed, we’re all sweating here”.



The deck of the anchored ship was too exposed to the sun. No wonder many complaints came out. Class D was standing on the ship ready to go down while

enduring the heat, and in the end Horikita joined them too. At first glance it seemed like a usual situation, but something has shifted. There was like a feeling of discomfort and uneasiness. Even Horikita who is usually a methodical and scrupulous person seemed to be anxious about outward appearances. Nevertheless, she kept her black hair tousled not changing completely her own aspect.

She looked a bit cold and unconsciously she rubbed her arms while waiting for the landing on the island.

"What have you been up to?"

"I've been just reading a book in my room. "For Whom The Bell Tolls".... You wouldn't know".

C'mon. It was one of Ernest Hemingway's representative works, wasn't it? An unparalleled masterpiece, no doubts about it. I thought about it for a long time, but Horikita's hobby of reading this kind of books is amazing...But, I wonder about the priority of reading even during this wonderful trip. Well, in these circumstances I'm also dubious on whether I favoured the room as a good place to read books or not.

Let's just forget about it. The person herself won't say anything about the topic and to pry inquisitively from here would be rude.

"I'm anxious about the sequel, but if it's forbidden to bring personal items, then I can't do anything about it".

Regretfully and awkwardly, I clear my throat.

These are not things that people commonly say while going down to the beach.

Going ashore and leaving the boat took longer than I thought. Probably because the teachers divided and compacted the students in two sides, and they were proceeding to check their luggage.

"Hey, strangely aren't they being too guarded or, how should I say, careful? They should confiscate mobile phones during a test, not now. It looks like it's even forbidden bringing too many personal items"

"Definitely. If people are only playing in the ocean, I also feel like they don't really have to go to the extent of doing that".

By the way, abaft there was a helicopter. Speaking of unnaturalness and strangeness, that one was *unnatural* too. Well, it is true that it was a little suspicious, but maybe I was thinking too much. If students brought a mobile phone to the sea, probably some of them will end up getting it wet or broken. Bringing extra personal things could also imply that all the garbage will pollute the beach. If someone suddenly fell ill, the helicopter's dispatch could be useful and probably it wouldn't be such an unlikely story to tell...right?

Soon our turn will come, and we will get off the ramp after receiving a rigorous inspection.

At that time, I didn't realize yet this place was going to be the borderline between heaven and hell.

A/N: Thank you to all the people reading the prologue and this new update. We hope you'll look forward to upcoming updates patiently. Leave your comments down below and for further requests and inquiries, contact us [here](#).

Friendly reminder: People should be correct enough to give credits if they repost this translation somewhere else. It's out of respect for our translators' and editors' hard work. We won't hesitate to take drastic measures if people won't heed to this simple rule. Thank you.

Fierce words arrived from our homeroom teacher as we came leisurely chatting.

"From now on I will be calling the roll for class D. Students who have been called, please reply firmly."

We were instructed to form a line at the same time as our teacher started checking the attendance for the class while simultaneously holding a surfboard in one hand.

Ms. Chabashira wore the same jersey as the students. Rather than summer vacation, the atmosphere was closer to training camp.

Still, there were no signs of tension in most students.

"Oh c'mon, give us free time already. The sea is stretching in front of me, you know."

Ike, who was right behind me, annoyingly muttered. It seemed like most of the students wanted to run off to the sandy beach impatiently.

Shortly after, a tall teacher came forward, getting up to the prepared white platform.

It was Mr. Mashima, the English homeroom teacher in charge of A class, famous for being a stubborn person. He might seem beefy at first glance due to his pro-wrestling-like physique, but he was quite smart and taught special subjects sometimes before.

"First of all, I'm happy that you arrived safely to this place today. However, it's unfortunate that one student couldn't take part due to sickness."

"Ah, there's one sick guy who couldn't join this trip, poor thing."

Ike said in a low voice so that the teachers couldn't hear.

But I totally agreed with him.

If it were a half-baked trip then that would be okay, but it's a different thing with this much luxury. I wonder if he'll regret it after hearing about the trip from his friends later. I think he should have participated despite the fact that he was in a somewhat poor physical condition, even if he pushed himself to the impossible.

Nevertheless, the facial expressions of the teachers were rather severe for a trip.

Could it be that while for us students this is a vacation, will supervisors only treat it as a job?

No – it doesn't seem like it's going to be just that.

While Mr. Mashima was finding students in silence, I saw some adults wearing work clothes who started setting up a special tent a bit farther away. I could also see a laptop on a long table.

At the urban sounds that didn't match the rippling waves, the students began to look bewildered.

Mr. Mashima only uttered a cruel word, as if he was waiting for the air to change.

"So, Let's go ahead with this academic year's first trial."

"Eh? Trial? What do you mean?"

In that moment, when this matter popped up, it wasn't just those around Ike. It seemed like all the classes were ready to burst.

Till just now, no, even now, the students thought that it was just a class trip. They were gathering like they had been attacked unexpectedly. Our vacation in the summer holiday depended on the benevolence of the school. But this was, as I thought, just an illusion.

The change from relief to tension was too much.

"The duration period will be of one week. It ends at noon on August 7. From now on, you are going to live on this deserted island for one week. It is a test to see if you can live all together as a group. Furthermore, this special trial has been designed in reference to real life corporate training. Even before we start I am going to give you hints about what it takes to win this special test."

"Since this island is deserted, there are no ships or boats, what will we do about accommodations?"

Class B and Class C that were close to Mr. Mashima hit him with this question.

"That's right! Boarding a ship is not allowed without a justifiable reason. Living on this island requires you to consider everything, from sleeping place to meal preparation. The moment the test starts, each class will separately receive 2 tents and 2 flashlights. You will be provided with one box of matches. There is no restriction in supply of sunscreen cream. Each person will receive one toothbrush. As an exception, sanitary good are allowed without restriction only for girls. You can ask anything to your homeroom teacher. That's all. What's left now is to distribute the provisions."

"Whaaaat? So to win this deserted island trial, I have to turn into a survivor? Now, it's not the time to talk nonsense! This is not an anime or a cartoon!"

"We can't sleep all together in just 2 tents! And what are we going to do

about food? I can't do this!"

Ike made a fuss in a loud voice so that everyone could hear.

Developing self-sufficiency while living in a desert island. Hunting wild animals for food, taking a bath in the river and streams and building our beds with tree branches. It was seriously like watching a movie or reading a novel. Who would have expected that it'd come the day in which our school prepared this kind of test? But there was no sign from Mr. Mashima that this was some kind of a joke. No! It seemed to me that he was no astonished at all. And then came his next words.

"It may not be to your advantage to know, but I will tell you a small piece of trivial information. This deserted island belongs to a big enterprise, the same that designed this very test. It is a top-secret operation, so nobody else knows what is happening on this island."

"No..... way!!!! So ... This is not just some special operation. The island itself plays an important role in this whole thing. This is why it exists, being a test ground."

"No way!! This can't be happening!"

"Now, because it is against the rules, let's stop."

"So what Mr. Mashima told us about this island, only a part of it was true. In this world, there are many other forms of enterprises like our school that exist, and the training course can be changed suddenly. Your place in work is not just your chair on the office but also your ability to move forward by the cast of your dice, just like when your salary is decided. The world is much wider and deeper than you know."

Watching Ike's reckless moves, Ms. Chabashira said this in a voice like she was hurt and continued.

"In other words you get to draw the thin line between reality and unreality."

Many students, not able to grasp the realisation of the situation, had a glum look on their faces.

"What is the meaning of this test... I bet you guys are thinking like this, now.

Or you may doubt the very existence of this training program, but, students who are thinking like this will become adults with no possibilities in the future. You may think... Is this talk a basis to criticise with words like 'You're impossible', 'You're ridiculous'? But you guys are just students. You are still nobodies and your worthlessness is equal among yourselves. Are you going to criticise the methods of a top class corporation? That would be ridiculous. To give you an example. In order to control a corporation, you have to rise to the top as the manager. If you were the president who runs a higher-ranking company than the one I cited, you may have the right to deny it. However, there shouldn't exist a basis that seeks to deny lesser human beings, in the first place."

Each of us, still in shock, having just heard only fragments of these words. Wishfully thinking that this whole thing is just a lie. But it was exactly as Mr. Mashima had said before. There is no point into being in denial. Starting to think selfishly, I realised my situation. I have to pass the election part of the trial first and stop thinking that 'This is ridiculous' or 'This cannot be happening'. I should start by trying to understand the people near me. Should I approach them with humor?

"But, teacher... It's supposed to be the summer holidays. And we came here with the pretext of a trip. Don't you think taking part in a training survival test instead is foul play?"

Some students of the class finally remembered how to protest. This was followed by the others, too.

"I get it. You are not wrong about this point. I also understand your discontent and grumbling."

Unlike with Ike, Mr. Mashima recognised a part of the objection by the students but did not make any trivial remarks. At that point everyone's dissatisfaction was obvious. The process of arriving at this point, the sense of objection. The point that the viewpoints of the students and the teachers were different.

"But, do not worry. In this cruel every day life, to be coerced into rigorous criticism is quite common. When we say that this is a special trial test do not

think of it too deeply. From now on during a week, you will swim in the sea, you will also have barbecues. I think it will be nice. You will be able to sit around campfires, talk with friends and develop relationships. That's not too bad, right? The theme of this special test is 'Freedom'."

"Eh?? Eh??..... Freedom is the theme?.... We can also make a barbecue then???? And all this, is a part of the test? I feel confused..."

Even though it is a test, they chose 'Freedom' as the theme. As soon as the students heard about the theme, they felt more perplexed.

"This survival test on the deserted island is supposed to be of major importance. It has been decided that each class will be provided with 300 points. If you decide to spend these points wisely for one week, there is a possibility that you will enjoy this test like you are being on a trip. For this very reason we have prepared a manual. Mr. Mashima has made this manual by gathering info from various teachers for years, until it was big enough to be turned into a book. This book contains a list of how you can obtain points. Advises about every day necessities, drinking water or finding food, also about how to make a barbecue. About equipment, ingredients and how to prepare a meal, how to catch food from the sea, how to have enough food and water, how to fully enjoy your everyday life, how to gather various tools and how to use them in many occasions."

Gradually the stern look on the students' faces started to change.

"In other words, with these 300 points we will be able to have whatever we want? That's right! We can obtain what we need by accumulating points! We may make it. If we make a proper plan of how to spend and how to accumulate points for one week, it's not impossible! If we can live with these points for a week then truly this test will be like a vacation. More like it will be the closest thing that we can have to vacation."

"But, teacher... You said this is a trial? Isn't it supposed to have a level of difficulty?"

"No, there is no difficulty, it will not even affect the second semester, I guarantee it."

"So... We just have to enjoy ourselves here for one week?"

"That's right. Just enjoy yourselves freely. Of course, to live a community life with the minimum necessary, there must be rules you have to abide, so that this won't be a difficult thing for you."

"Should we assume that there is really no risk?' If that is the case, then we should find out the real purpose of this trial..."

So we pretended like it is a simple summer vacation, like a class trip exchange in a loop. What is the meaning of this. I wonder... Thinking this and that. I do not think I have realised yet the meaning of school. But the next few words by Mr. Mashima made the purpose of this test more obvious.

"When this special examination is over, the points of each class that are left, will be added into each class' general points. The points will be reflected when the summer vacation is over."

These last words sounded like a gust of wind blowing into a midsummer beach. A cloud of dust soaring up to the sky.

There was no mistake, Mr. Mashima's last words were the biggest blow today and it let us all thinking about them. A written test calculates the literary ability, in this test the superiority is determined by the class as a whole. Every time D class divided the points was put in a really tight place. That's why this time we have to implement the rules perfectly, so that we make a difference. It seems that there is no significant disadvantage between A and D class.

"If we can endure for a week, then could we see our 'pocket-money' increasing substantially?"

That's right, this is not a test in scholarly abilities, we compete for endurance in a form of a battle. While not rejecting the desire to win, we must endure patiently. So we must be able to reach high in the class rankings. Even Ike's words were not just a dream.

"Each class will receive one copy of the manual. If somehow it is lost, a reissue is possible, but it will cost points. So, keep it safe. Again, there is one absent student from A class. Since this is a test that requires physical ability, even though the student retired due to poor health reasons we will extract 30 points from A class as a penalty. So, A class will begin with 270 points."

A class was present, but they accepted the merciless blow. The students were trembling already with the sudden state of affairs. The other classes though, were surely looking surprised by the extraction of the 30 points.

The end of Mr. Mashima's words signaled the end of the announcement. Each homeroom teacher was holding a megaphone and calling their respective classes, while trying to give supplementary explanations. We were gathering around our homeroom teacher Ms. Chabashira. The distance between the four classes became clear.

"From next month 30,000 points, From next month 30,000... From next month 30,000... Let's do it!!!!"

Ike and the others were building a triumphant pose. The girls looked delighted as they were discussing what things were needed. The biggest desire of D class is to accumulate more points. We just have to ignore living in luxury for one week. It is really simple in words.

"Now to all the members we will distribute wrist watches. You will wear it for one week until the end of the trial. You are not allowed to take it off. In case you take it off a penalty will be implemented. This wristwatch has not just an instant time-table, it can track body temperature, your pulse rate, it detects your movements and your senses, it also has GPS. It is equipped that way so that you can use it even in a state of emergency. If you find yourselves in a state of emergency, please push this button. These were given to us gracefully by the manufacturer thanks to Ms. Chabashira."

As Class D was taking their tents, Ms. Chabashira brought the box to distribute the watches.

"When you say in a state of emergency... like when a bear appears?"

"To give you an example... This is a trial, you have to look left and right, then, there is a possibility that you may find the answer to your question."

"Hmmm... telling me something like this, it is quite scary."

"I do not think that there are wild animals here. If any of our students got hurt, that would be a big problem. The truth is we gave these wristwatches for the well-being of our students . We are on a deserted island, so, for the sake of

the school's reputation and for the guarantee of our safety, isn't it something that it should be done?"

With these smooth words the wristwatches were distributed for the enforcement of our safety. So it is not only the eyes of the teachers that will watch the students but also these devices will monitor the movement of the students on the island. It is exactly like having cameras in the school classes. Monitoring our physical condition, dealing with unexpected circumstances also. Plus, the helicopter that I saw on the ferry-boat. Maybe it is ready to fly in case of emergency.

As the wristwatches were distributed, each student was wearing it on the left or right hand, as they liked it.

"But is it ok to get on the water, wearing this?"

"No problem. It is waterproof. But, still in case of malfunctioning we will replace it immediately. However, we already run test management protocol by a trusted person."

This special trial was designed by the school with eccentricity and elegance and I do not think this was the first time. It should be carried out taking into account that various situations may happen. However there might be some slips.

"Ms. Chabashira from now on, during a week we will be living on this island. Is there any way we can survive without spending our points at all?"

"The school competes as a whole, right? For food and for water too, you should start preparations. It looks like your tent is not sufficient. Thinking about a solution for these problems is also a part of the test."

"That is nothing that I know of!"

Both the boys and the girls looked very confused. The thought that we were not going to have a bed to sleep brought a feeling of uneasiness.

"It's alright. If you can catch a fish properly, you can also find fruits in the woods, right? Use leaves or trees to make a tent, you know. Do your best even in your worst state."

Said Ike quite indifferently as if there was no anxiety but fully motivated by the well-kept 300 points.

It would be fine living alone, but the class is composed of more than 30 people. Even if they said that all the members need to obtain important things, probably it won't work so well immediately.

"I'm sorry Ike, but I don't think it will go as you're expecting. Open the distributed manuals."

Hirata did as Ms. Chabashira said and opened the manual we received.

"Firstly, let's read the part on the last page where the assessed items are listed. Those will become a very important information which will symbolize this special trial. It depends on you guys whether you'll be dead or alive." On the last page there was a description that said: "The established penalties will be imposed on those who fall under the following."

"Those who have been estimated to be in a remarkably wrecked physical condition or having serious injuries will lose 30 points as well as become retired."

"In case an act of polluting the environment is discovered, you will lose 20 points."

"Each one of you will lose 5 points if you're absent from every day's roll calls at 8 am and 8 pm."

And the biggest punishment was stated in a total of four matters: "In cases such as violent acts against other classes, plundering or damaging utensils, the class affiliated with the students involved will be immediately disqualified and the private points of the subject will be all confiscated".

It looked like A class have received these rules' penalties as well.

The fourth obstructive behaviour was very reasonable while the remaining three were clearly rules for not letting each student do unreasonable things.

With roll calls being in the morning and night, it not only becomes impossible to sleep outdoors all night but also suppresses barbaric behaviour of scattering excrement around randomly as well.

In other words, this is a contest to examine one's endurance.

As a school that takes care of their precious kids, it could be said that these are the required rules that are impossible to avoid.

"It's up to you to behave unreasonably, but if 10 students feel sick all your patience and effort will disappear in bubbles. Once you decide to retire you can't return to the trial. When you need to push through, I want you to be resolute, Ike"

Some of those students who made suppositions were confused, knowing that the possibility to survive the trial with just perseverance had been excluded. The strategy of not using even one point became partly impossible like this, since the possibility of other classes challenging survival with all one's strength would almost disappear. At the same time, whether you play or resignate to fate in this trial, it seems that it isn't just patience that becomes distinct here.

In what way to efficiently use points, save and overcome it for a week?
Perhaps...

Anyway, the literal form of "special trial" comes to sight little by little.

"Basically, it's inevitable to use this system's points, right?"

Said a girl named Shinohara, who was listening to the conversation.

"I disagree with compromising from the beginning as a method of fighting.
We should put up until we can."

"I get you, but it will be hard if our physical condition suffers."

"Hirata, don't say discouraging things. We have a test stand/a tolerance test first, right?"

The more we get to know the rules, the more we meet with differing opinions. Opinions are going to separate. Even so, the range of items on the manual that could be purchased was quite wide. Equipment essential for survival such as tent and cookware, digital camera and transceiver, parasol, life belt, barbecue set and items for amusement such as fireworks. Food and water essential for living. Everything was set in a way that can be arranged in points.

If we wanted to use points, everyone could apply by requesting it from a

homeroom teacher whenever.

“Ms. Chabashira, please answer if you can. What happens if someone retires after using all 300 points?”

Horikita, who got the basic explanation, raised her hand, asking Ms. Chabashira.

“In that case, only the number of people who retire will increase/Retired people will only increase, if that’s the case. Points won’t change from zero.”

“In other words, we don’t fall into minus with this trial, right?”

Ms. Chabashira affirmed.

Mr. Mashima also said there weren’t negative influences of the trial. It looked like it was true.

Ms. Chabashira continued while mincingly checking the time on her wristwatch:

“One supplied tent is big enough for 8 people to use. The weight is close to being 15 kilos so please be careful when carrying. Moreover, the school is absolutely not going to help regarding the loss or damage of supplied items. If you need a new tent, remember to use your points.”

“Is it okay if I ask a thing, teacher? Where does it say about this roll call?”

“It has been decided that the homeroom teacher will be together with each class until the end of the trial. If you decided yourself a base camp, report it. I will set up a base and roll calls will be done there. Once you decide on a base camp you can’t change it without a justifiable reason so please think about it thoroughly. This applies to other classes as well. No exception.”

Does this mean that Ms. Chabashira will spend a week with D class as a supervisor?

Of course, she won’t help in any way.

“Look, teacher. I’m sorry for interrupting your story halfway, but I want to go to the bathroom – could be the juice I’ve drunk a while ago. Where’s the toilet?”

Sudou was calmly looking around. It seemed like he didn't hear the announcement.

"Bathroom? I was thinking of explaining that from now on. Use this when you need to go to the toilet. "

(With a foot), She hit a cardboard box out of a pile. Then, she peeled the gum tape and took a folded corrugated box out.

"Huh? What's that?"

"It's a basic toilet. Each class will be supplied with one. Please handle it carefully."

It was not Sudou who was the most perplexed with this explanation, but the girls in class.

"Don't tell me we're also gonna be using that!?"

The one who was particularly surprised and raised her voice was not Karuizawa, but Shinohara. Rather than saying that this was Karuizawa's group, the girl had a presence to the point of gathering a certain support from other girls.

"Both boys and girls will be sharing it. But don't worry. It comes with a one-touch tent that can also be used for changing clothes. It's not like you will be seen by anyone."

"That's not a problem, to say so! But it's in a corrugated box! That's absolutely unacceptable!"

"It might be a corrugated box, but it's a well-made one that can also be used in times of catastrophe. I'll show you how to use it from now on so please remember it diligently."

While being booed from the girls, Ms. Chabashira familiarly set up a toilet with her hands. Then she set a blue plastic bag and put something like a white sheet in it.

"This sheet is called a water-supply polymer sheet. It covers and solidifies filth. It makes filth invisible and at the same time suppresses the smell. After you're done using it, stack the sheet up again. It is possible to use one vinyl by

repeating this around five times. Only these vinyls and sheets will be supplied unlimitedly. If absolutely necessary, you can change it after each use."

At this explanation the girls went silent and listened. If this were a time of catastrophe they wouldn't be able to complain.

Cause it won't matter if it's a boy or a girl or a corrugated box at that time.

But now it was quite difficult to say that this place was a location of disaster and that we should act like it was.

"I can't do this! I definitely can't!"

Starting with Shinohara, nearly all girls rejected it all at once. Ike, who has been watching the situation silently, said sullenly:

"Let's endure this kind of toilet. It's not time to fight over it, Shinohara."

"Stop messing around. It doesn't matter to guys, right. I'm not gonna do it in a corrugated box."

"It's up to you. I don't have anything to say. But it's not approved to relieve yourselves in the forest, as well as in the sea or the river. Don't forget that."

With only this warning, the teacher continued talking indifferently.

"But, a corrugated box! Besides, guys will also be close by, right? Disgusting!"

Shinohara, who wasn't acceptive of the fact, started to throw out her anger toward boys, especially Ike.

"What. I don't understand why you treat us like perverts."

"It's true, right? You seem to be very perverted."

"Huh? Ouch, that hurts. I'm a big gentleman."

"Don't make me laugh. A gentleman – what are you talking about? By far the biggest pervert contender."

Ike and Shinohara had a heated argument.

"Anyway, I think it's impossible for me."

Shinohara and most of the girls were thoroughly unaccepting of the situation.

"Then what will you do? It's not possible putting up with a toilet for a week,

right?"

"Well, that's..."

The teacher, who was watching Shinohara and Ike's complaints and dispute as someone else's problem, suddenly made a sullen face when she looked behind us.

"Ya-oh~ ... "

Such a faded voice came from behind.

The owner of that voice rushed over to the targeted person, capturing and hugging them from behind.

"... what are you doing? "

"What, skinship? I was thinking what would you do about it."

Said Ms. Hoshinomiya, a teacher in charge of B class, stroking Ms. Chabashira's two hands harshly.

"Whenever I touch Sae-chan's hair, it's always smooth."

"Do you understand school rules properly? It's inexcusable to eavesdrop on other class' information."

"I'm an unimportant teacher. Even if I hear any information by chance, I certainly won't tell it. However, wouldn't you say this feels something like fate? The two of us coming to this island, it's unbelievable. Don't you think so?"



Fate? Ms. Chabashira completely ignored Ms. Hoshinomiya's significant words

and their hidden meaning.

“Shut up! And quickly go back to B Class”

“Oh! Isn’t that Ayanokoji-kun? It’s been a long time~”

I didn’t have many opportunities to meet Ms. Hoshinomiya because unlike other teachers that I saw regularly in class, she was also the doctor of the school. I bowed lightly and replied:

“Summer is the season of love. If you want to confess to a man you like, maybe it could be effective if done before this beautiful sea?”

“The sea is beautiful but I can’t afford to do this during class”

She cried out. In view of the current situation, since everybody was staring, I wished she would stop getting involved with me.

“I have to take it easy”

“Oi, should I report this as a behavioural problem to the school upper authorities? There is no more time left”

“Ok ok, don’t glare at me like that...I understood, I really got it. See you”

She took her leave from Ms. Chabashira with a sad face. Just when Ms. Hoshinomiya went back to B Class, it was the only suitable time for Ms. Chabashira to bring up the subject.

“So, let’s explain the additional rules”

“Additional rules? There’s still something else...?”

“Shortly, you will be granted permission to roam freely, but several spots are provided in each part of the island. These spots will be recognized as places simply called ‘Rights of Possession’, and the class that will have them is entitled to exercise its own rights there. How to use them is a prerogative of the class that got the right. However, the right of possession has validity only for 8 hours from when it takes effect first after which the right is automatically revoked. It means that every time, you get the right to acquire another class. And you can get one bonus point each time you occupy one spot once. Even so, this one point is provisional and cannot be used during the trial. So, it will be settled and added up only at the end of the examination. Due to the school constantly

monitoring the situation, there is no room for fraud regarding this rule. It's better to pay attention to this last point"

"Well, then, isn't that important? It's fantastic to come to the point. Leave it all to us!!!"

Sooner than later, Ike begun to ask Yamauchi and others to go searching.

That's also written in the manual in minute details. And various devices that indicated the right of possession were always prepared near the spots. We don't know how many spots are on the island, but it can be said that they should be important factors in the trail. Still...

"I understand that you're impatient, but this rule has a big risk. It's about whether to make use of that risk, take it into consideration and check it. All is written in the manual, including that risk."

As Ms. Chabashira suggested, the manual was written to clarify the special rules and additional rules all organized in bullet points.

- An Exclusive Keycard is required to occupy a spot
- You will get 1 point for each occupation. Occupied spots can be used freely
- If you use a spot occupied by another class without permission, you will get a penalty of 50 points
- The use of Keycards is restricted to the people who became leaders
- Leaders cannot be changed without justifiable reasons

The above-mentioned are the general rules. Subsequently, there has been also Ms. Chabashira's explanation, but it's written that there will be a cancellation of 'possession rights' once every 8 hours and if some spots are unoccupied they can be seized simultaneously in several places, even if it's the same class that holds them down repeatedly. It's all permitted.

If one successfully occupies three spots repeatedly every 8 hours, he can get more than 50 points at the end of the trial. However, there is a big risk there.

Up to here, the rules are on a first-come-first-served basis. It seems to be a good mechanism if one possesses the same spots repeatedly by force. But,

that's impossible. There's a rule written in the end about the reason.

On the 7th and last day, during roll call time, we're entitled to the right of guessing another class's leader.

In addition to this the classes, whose leader was caught, will lose all the bonus points they've accumulated so far. It was a rule that would make people hesitate in participating to the "occupation battle", unless they had very great confidence.

"Without exception, you all get to decide one person who will be unquestionably the leader. However, you have the freedom to take part or not. If you're not greedy and ambitious enough, you won't become known as a leader and you will probably be over soon. When the leader is decided, please report it to me. In that occasion, we will provide a Keycard stamped with the leader's name. You have a time limit, until today's roll call. If you don't decide by that time, we will decide at our own discretion here. That's all"

In other words, even if you only stole a glance at the card, the embossed leader's identity will surely be brought to light. With this, Ms. Chabashira's explanation was over. The die was cast and then entrusted to the students. Hirata immediately set in motion.

"Later, there will also be time to think about who you should pick as a leader. But first, where will the base camp be? Whether we're going to be on the beach or in the forest...we should think carefully about the spot"

Attached to the manual, was a simple map of the island. Only the size and the shape of the island were written there. The area and the inclination of the forest were absolutely unknown. I'd say this was more a blank piece of paper.

"It seems like we have to fill in the necessary parts by ourselves"

This was confirmed by the fact that a ballpoint pen has been prepared especially for this.

"It's okay to have a spot near the ship where all the teachers are, right?"

"No, don't be too sure. As I suppose, there are only few spots, so near here you won't find anything"

If there's no water, there's no food too. Building a base here means that it's possible it'll end up being the farthest position from the place where we'll get the resources. To make matters worse, during daytime the sunlight is very strong and the environment is rough. On the other hand, it seems like there's also the risk of going too far in the forest.

"More importantly. First, I need a toilet. I can't hold it anymore"

Sudou grabbed the simplified toilet assembled by Ms. Chabashira.

We assembled a one-touch tent, set it up at a short distance and then we went inside. Shinohara and others were looking at the situation while sitting huddled together, impossibly close. Ms. Chabashira took a step backward. She probably won't take part in this anymore and we may now do as we like.

"Hey, Hirata-kun. Isn't it better to decide ahead of time about what to do about the toilet?

Before long, things including the toilet will be necessary to other students too. The girls' thought is reasonable.

"We could decide but, don't we just have to grin and bear it now, do we?"

"No, it doesn't mean that there's no other way"

Hirata, who had dropped his eyes on the manual, raised his face while saying this.

"In the manual it's written that temporary toilets can also be purchased with points and then installed"

At those words Shinohara and others gathered together around him all at once and looked into the manual. The functions of a provisional toilet seemed to be impeccable, and seeing the reference pictures it compares favourably to the toilet at home because it's flushable. If this is the case, the girls will consent enough. But the problem is that it needs 20 points per temporary toilet? It's really difficult to judge whether it's expensive or cheap.

"Absolutely Not! I mean I don't really like that too...Even that, for me it's impossible!"

A lot of girls, triggered by Shinohara's remarks, agreed to that. For the girls,

the presence of the toilets, may be better than food and water's. They communicated well enough to show their intention of not budging an inch from there.

"Wait, wait a minute. You guys want to spend 20 points? Only for a toilet?"

Reacting acutely, Ike ached to tell that he was against it and wanted to save points. Just like other guys who could bear with the cardboard box toilet. It probably means that we should refrain from useless expenses as much as possible.

"About the toilet, yes it's a good one. But we get this one too. Look! We have a lot of time to use points. It's a bad idea not to save points now".

"You can't decide, because it's Hirata-kun that will collect all the opinions and decide. Hey, Hirata-kun"

Ignoring Ike's talk, Shinohara pleaded Hirata to buy a temporary toilet.

"That's right...to have at least a decent toilet for girls would definitely be....."

"You have the freedom to gather opinions but you can't decide arbitrarily"

Ike looked at Hirata, who wanted to approve the toilet's purchase, and hurriedly stopped him.

"AHH, STOP BUGGING PEOPLE. Karuizawa-san say something. We have the temporary toilets here"

Shinohara called out to Karuizawa, representative of the girls, asking for consent.

"Is that so? That's going to be pretty rough. But I want the class points. It seems like I'll have to bear with it too"

Unexpectedly, Karuizawa, who was likely to complain first, agreed to use the simplified toilet.

"The school will prepare the minimum necessary. I will endure it. There's a river where we can bathe, and if we use well this place, don't you think it will come out okay?"

"That's.....Karuizawa-san!!!!"

If Karuizawa said so, there's no way of going against her face to face, even though Shinohara is very self-assertive. That's because majority of the girls is more attached to Karuizawa, so the influential voice has been by all means restricted only to her. Yukimura suddenly joined in the fight between Ike and Shinohara.

"I don't understand the girls' feelings of wanting a provisional toilet. However, I don't accept that we use the points indiscriminately and/or arbitrarily object our opinions. If you want a provisional toilet, I'd want to tell you the decision after collecting at least the majority of the votes"

Sliding the glasses up his nose, he vented (his anger) with severe voice towards Shinohara.

"I....I am just making a natural request as a girl. Boys should mind their own business"

"A natural request? Mind our own business? That's impossible to understand. Isn't that simply discrimination?"

"WHAT! Discrimination....Ahhh my head hurts. Hirata-kun, get him off my back, ok?"

Probably they will never yield on the toilet and Shinohara, by herself, refused to back down.

"This test is a rare opportunity. A chance to fill in the points difference with other classes. Valuable points cannot be used for temporary toilets and such. I have no intention of staying in D Class forever. It's out of question to follow whatever one would like to do personally like Shinohara. So here, I want to decide on a secure plan"

"Eh? About that, do you mean to suggest I wasn't thinking about anything or the consequences?"

"If even a monkey can do it, one should be able to work here following the natural instinct. I hate that women operate according to emotionally charged arguments"

"Huh? It doesn't mean that I want to use all the points indiscriminately. I meant that there has at least to be the minimum necessary things. Do you have

the intention of only speaking in theory?

“Both of you calm down! I understand what Yukimura-kun is trying to say but if you talk so belligerently maybe you won’t resolve anything, will you? More calmly.....”

“Calmly? Under no circumstances should we use the points at our discretion?”

“That’s...”

Hirata-kun, who was caught in a dilemma between two people whose tension was rising, was desperately attempting to settle and organize things while trying to not to show his troubled face as much as possible.

“For Class D that has no leadership, the future is going to be unpredictable and dark. Besides, Hirata-kun who is a pacifist can’t decide on one thing decently, right?”

While I was watching over the situation from a little distance, next to me there was Horikita who sighed a little too heavily, after realizing that the situation wasn’t going to develop at all.

“It seems likely that this trial is going to be much more complicated and difficult to understand than we thought.”

Unusually, rather than being perplexed Horikita showed signs of being embarrassed.

“It’s a great opportunity to get points – and you’re okay with enduring it, right?”

Seen from profile, Horikita’s expression seemed to be a bit irritated rather than complex.

“I wonder. I’m not optimistic enough to say that it is easy at this stage. I’m the same as the others. I’ve never lived in such a place before so I can’t predict anything. I’m realizing the trial that seemed to be simple at a glance has changed greatly. I want to save the points we all share, but I can’t find good resolution. What an obscene trial.”

There were groups who decided to use points, groups who decided not to use

points and groups who've decided to use every important point.

Even if they're divided in a very simple way, the classes fell into these 3 categories. Furthermore, a small difference emerged from there as well. In other words, there was a strategic pattern which envisioned only the number of students in substance. It won't be easy to face that fact in a class of over 30 people.

About the thick manual, as much as one can adjust himself according to those pages, at the same time, it also seemed to represent the difficulty of the class to be united.

From far away, Ms. Chabashira looked persistently at the confrontation between boys and girls with cold eyes, but not to the point of assessing them. After all D Class was a gathering of defective goods and was only going to fall.

Was it a suicide?

“What do you want to do?”

“I want to leave as much as one point like Yukimura-kun too. But I'm not confident I can live a week without satisfactory equipment. That's my honest opinion. I think we should challenge ourselves, but how far can we bear it... How about you?”

“Mainly the same opinion. Everything is much unknown.”

“Look. By any chance, did A Class and B Class already settled with a story?”

We turned our heads to the voice of a flustered girl.

Although only a few minutes had passed, I could see several students from each class gathering together and going into the forest. Perhaps, they were going to look for spots or the best base-camp area. As if symbolizing their quality, we in D class and C class are still lacking in finding resolution. We couldn't even properly make a start.

“Oh, shit. This isn't time to be leisurely talking about toilet! I'm gonna do anything to protect my points. I'll go find camp areas and spots. Yukimura, Shinohara and the others – don't use points by yourselves.”

“Got it. We won't.”

You couldn't say that Ike and Yukimura were usually good buddies, but it looked like they would cooperate together if they had the same goal.

"Wait a bit Ike-kun. It's dangerous to go inside the woods without a plan."

"Would staying here worrying solve everything? It won't right?"

The feelings of going and staying were clashing with each other.

However, Hirata didn't meet with the basis of persuading Ike and the others to stop their actions.

"I'll come back as soon as I find a usable spot or site. After everyone moves there we'll talk to each other. Easy-talk, right?"

Do Sudou and Yamauchi intend to search for a spot as well?

They had gathered around Ike who was losing his patience.

"Is Ayanokouji also coming?"

Sudou called out and met my eyes. I lightly shook my head and refused.

"I want the three of you to never act alone. If you get lost, it will be hard."

It looked like Hirata realized it's useless to stop overflowing vigor.

"I see. Well, find various things!"

Even so, it became hot with nothing blocking the sunlight.

Seems like we've dried up discussing in this place for a long time.

"At least, it seems tough to build a base here..."

Classmates started occasionally shrieking due to the heat and it looked like Hirata felt the toughness of making a base camp out of a beach as well. If this were a genuine camp, we'd have ways of setting up a parasol and turf tent, having fun swimming in the sea and protecting ourselves from the sun as much as we like, but in this condition even that was hard.

"Shall we move until we find a place with shade for the present? We can also talk while moving."

Hirata took the initiative and started carrying the tent. The other guys jumped too.

“By the way ... Did Sudou tidy up that toilet properly?”

One girl pointed at the toilet anxiously.

Someone said that when Sudou came out after doing his business, he was empty-handed.

At least inside that ...

The sun was blazing down on the toilet left. The inside of the tent was certainly a steam bath.

Our classmates looked like they were about to start screaming from the increasing heat. Hirata too, positioned on the beach began to grasp the difficulty of the situation. If we wanted to have a real camping, then we needed to build a tarp tent. From swimming in the sea or playing on the beach to protecting our bodies from the sun, how many more things do we need? The situation, now, is rather difficult.

“For the time being, let’s move in a place under shade.”

“We must see how we can move the whole camping and we can talk about the rest while working”.

Hirata took the initiative and started preparing the tent for the move. The rest of the boys followed.

“By the way.... That toilet, I wonder if Sudo tidied it up properly, after all?”

One girl looking anxious already about the situation and pointed to the toilet. It is true that Sudo had gone to take care of some business, but he left empty-handed. At least within that blazing sunlight, we left the toilet as it is, because, inside the tent it’s steaming just like being in a bath house.

Walking from the shore to the mainland, a huge forest appeared, one of the boys looked up anxiously at the woods.

“Is it ok to enter this huge forest.... We might as well lose our way?.... I cannot see at all what’s like inside”

That’s why we have to implement some rules and that is the reason our wristwatches are equipped with the emergency button. We have to cooperate tightly, If we fail to collaborate, we are going to spend our money like water and

I am afraid that we will spend all of our points.

"Hey, Karuizawa! Hirata is really amazing! He even accepts to do all the things that the others don't".

"Pfff!!! But of course! Calling the other boys for help would make him look so lame, leave everything to Hirata!"

Hirata was working with eagerness transporting the tent, walking past Karuizawa's group, they looked at him with great admiration. Incidentally, I was passing, too, helping to carry some packages. At that time we had to move the simple toilet that we had built, so we had to fold it as it was made from cardboard. I have to help out, too, somehow. After that there is going to be a lot of work to think about and a lot of decisions to be made, but for the time being, all I have to do is to show fervor that I want to help.

On the girls' side, Horikita as she had already chosen to be isolated, followed the group at the end of the line, slowly and silently. Walking regularly in one direction, sometimes staying still making some gestures and then immediately going back. As I was just back to base camp, I found myself walking side to side with Horikita.

"Not in a good mood?"

"Honestly speaking, I could say I feel a little gloomy. Say I am not designed to be that person. Living on a deserted island, even so not having to live alone but with many others."

Now, regardless of something like the spirit of cooperation, acting as a member of a group, is far beyond from Horikita's abilities. Even though I think it is good to make a great effort to blend with our classmates to improve, but, to say it out loud to her is futile, so I stop myself.

"

You know, the things that you told me before, I can say that they proved to be quite practical".

Turning to tell me this, Horikita made a rather amusing face.

"My scholarly abilities may be out of the question, I am talking about this

conversation. I think, though, that it has been decided that I am dead weight, already. So, taking the initiative that I have to look for Ike and Satou, I made my exit. I did not mind, particularly, whether my behaviour was right or wrong. If it is them. They would move fast. I might be able to find something good”

“Yes, you may find something. But more importantly, are you all right?”

“Why are you asking?”

She looked me with eyes like scowling at me. I gave her a response like ‘It’s nothing’ and I averted her gaze. As I was making this small talk with Horikita, I felt the eyes of someone on my back. Looking over my shoulder, I catch a glimpse of Sakura walking at the far end of the line and looking straight at my way. As soon as she realised that I turned my head back looking at her, she looked flustered and averted her gaze.

“What’s the matter?”

“It’s nothing”. Maybe, I was too mindful, turning around to see.

“I wonder what are the other classes doing. I am a little interested to see how is their attitude. If A Class and B Class thoroughly enforced a plan to restrain the use of their points, we must too, be prepared. In this kind of exam, we cannot let happen a big difference in points.”

At that point, I realised that this extraordinary determination might exist. By Horikita’s serious look from before. The change of behaviour in someone’s every day life by tiredness. A test of scholarly ability may separate the current status quo, but the only antagonism in this test, may be to fight so that we will not fall behind A class at any cost.

“To fall behind upper classes would be so terrible”

“The things that Ms. Chabashira said I thought they were joke at that time, but are you really not interested in moving up to an upper class?”

Ms. Chabashira said some of those things when she bumped into me and Horikita in the consultation room.

“I don’t really have doubts on it. Even Ike and others don’t want to fall behind A Class, especially. I’m happy if there will be a lot of allowances every month

and I would be lucky enough if I can go to A Class”

I don't even know what Hirata and Karuizawa are thinking, to what extent these were their true intentions.

“People who entered this school thought that they entered to make use of those privileges”

Rather than looking discontent, she coughed lightly with a puzzled air. Originally at the time of enrollment, college entrance and place of employment were supposed to be guaranteed by the school. De facto, a lot of students were expecting them.

“What did you choose this school for?”

“About that, can I also say the same? To use openly and shamelessly of those privileges”

“.....I see”

This time she coughed openly in dissatisfaction, looking up to me with a sharp side glance. I think Horikita enrolled here to go to the same school as her brother. I understood so. If not for herself to climb up to A Class, to be recognized by her older brother. In other words, her original purpose in the school changed.

“It's not a pleasant thing to be prying into a person's past. That's a good example of it”

I intended to pierce the nail a little farther, but it seemed like she immediately realized my true intention. I'm trying to find out my past by analyzing this person's past, or perhaps I should say, by analyzing humans/other people thoroughly. That's not a pleasing thing for me. I'd like to do something about it as soon as possible.

“The only thing I can just tell you is that Ms. Chabashira leaked the information willfully. Can you not misunderstand me only on this point? I didn't accept you yet. Don't forget it”

“It's all right. I'm not thinking of wanting to be accepted anyway”

Shortly after, Hirata and the others stopped in a single line.

"Here you can both block the sunrays and you don't have to worry about being heard by someone around you"

Hirata and the others stopped walking when they entered a bit in the forest and resumed talking. Some of the boys gathered together as if united and begun to thrive on a clash of ideas they might have thought on their way here.

"Not just Ike, we all better move too. If we can seize a main spot from another class, at that rate the point difference will inevitably widen"

"Yeah, that's right. We have to move right away. But it's not good to neglect the current problems and leave them scattered around. First, shouldn't we begin from the solution to the toilet problem?"

"That's only a matter on whether we all support the supplied toilet"

Yukimura glared at his classmates, especially the girls' group.

"I was thinking while we were on the way, but first I think we should install a toilet"

Hirata then spoke to Yukimura with a slightly stronger tone. Because of the strength of those ending words, it seemed that the situation will not differ or budge an inch from before.

"Do not decide on your own. You should also get a feedback from Ike considering his dissenting opinion"

"The toilet's installment might be a necessary expense. In the first place, there's a simplified toilet to which we're not accustomed to, in a class of 30 or more people. I wonder if we could really put it to a good use without trouble"

"About that....we'll make good use of it.."

"But to put it in a few words, it's not practical. I really don't want to think to the worst case. But even if one person takes only 3 minutes to use it, by the time everyone are finished, more than 90 minutes will pass. Thereupon, will it be done by then?"

"It's a pointless assumption. Everyone can use the toilet all at once quickly. Given that even the school's decision was practical, they provided us with only one toilet. Shouldn't we make use of it cleverly?"

"I don't think so. From the get go, I always thought that one simple toilet is impossible. If you reflect from there, isn't that actually a hint that eventually we have to spend our points regardless and we have to learn how to use them efficiently. Yukimura-kun would know. Perhaps the other classes have reached the same deduction, namely that it's not possible to set up temporary toilets"

Certainly I feel that this test, no matter in which part we'll use the points, will be a critical time that will determine victory or defeat.

All supplies are way too incomplete in the first place. As if they suggested that you should be using points if you want to use a tent or flashlight that only half a class can utilize when feasible.

"It's all your speculation... Besides, if other classes do set up a toilet, we will be 20 points ahead if we put up with it. We can definitely use that, right?"

"Right. But, I feel that it's highly unlikely that putting up with toilet is a plus. It will put extra stress while inducing anxiety, and I'm also worried about hygiene. So after an objective judgement I was thinking that at least one toilet should be prepared."

It looked like Hirata came to a solid conclusion due to having time to calm down. That wasn't an act of buying male's objection, but a conviction for consent had to be secured eventually.

"I think girls can calm down and challenge themselves in the trial too."

Even Yoshimura couldn't deny the story struck without falling on the spot. He could understand the feeling of preserving points, but it's extremely difficult to endure things with one simple toilet. Classmates were stuffed with various information in one breath to the point where even natural things wouldn't come out soon in that condition. Yukimura, who couldn't bear surrounding gazes and silence, broke before long.

"... Got it. Well then, we should install a toilet."

In the end the installation of the toilet was consented due to Yukimura, who was before in the same objecting team as Ike, and was now giving in.

Horikita, Karuizawa, as well as Shinohara and the rest were a little relieved.

"Teacher. If we want a provisional toilet, is it possible to decide the installation site in detail?"

"If it's not on an impossible terrain then everywhere is fine. You can also re-transfer it after the installation, but in that case it will take time. The weight is over 100 kilos. Quite a bit of labor."

Hirata sighed in relief now that one problem was solved.

"The next thing is ... We've already heard opinions before, but I think we should explore to decide on a base camp as well. Consumption of points depends largely on where we settle down."

Answered Hirata not due to impatience, but to prevent classmates' backlash. Soon after we recruited volunteers, but as we thought no more than two guys have gathered. There aren't many people who have stepped inside the woods like this one. It's understandable.

"I wonder if someone among us is familiar with the survival."

Hirata asked holding on a ray of hope. Like in a corny manga, in times like this there is only one person you can count on. He looked back checking his classmates, but no one showed an attitude of coming forward. Then, Hakase who was silent until now raised a hand all of a sudden.

"We yearn for the main character who was driven into survival skills by his father and trained to survive alone even in the jungle since childhood."

Instantly Hakase, who was bashed, flustered apologized, but he was still hated by everyone.

"Erm, I will go if it's okay."

It was Kushida who volunteered to break a deadlock if no one wanted to participate. Seeing her appearance, the boys who bluntly refused [participating] had their eyes lighted up and started demonstrating their participation to volunteer. I guess there were students who were motivated by doing favor to Kushida as well as students who felt embarrassed that they let the girl take initiative.

I've raised my hand a bit later, roughly at the same time as Hirata started to

count the number of people.

“Eleven. If one more participated, we could make four teams.”

“Are you going too?”

“I’ll have to restrain. But it’s unusual to see you volunteer so assertively.”

“If you don’t have a role for some reason, you’ll be cut off from class.”

When ... A reserved hand beside me was raised. When Hirata saw that hand, he named it in relief.

“Thank you, Sakura-san. We’re 12 now. Let’s go in 4 teams with 3 persons each. It’s 1:30 now so I want you to return here at once at 3:00 regardless of the outcome.”

Then each person joined a team as they liked. In a blink of an eye I became a scrap even here.

“Hey, by all means, Ayanokouji-kun.”

Said Sakura who was likewise a scrap with nobody calling her, and ...

“Refreshing sun indeed. My body needs energy.”

Kouenji Rokusuke. This guy is really gonna cooperate with our research group. Luckily, a son of freedom and a quiet girl. With these two there won’t be any difficulty.

The moment we set foot into the woods, we were struck by the lush and overgrown greenery around us. It was much better than we avoided the direct sunlight that hit us on the beach, but still, the dampness and humidity made the heat unbearable. Suddenly, I feel a rush of coolness in the back of my neck, like a fan flapping.... I had the feeling that this mission was about to fail.

It’s, hot, it’s hot and as I am thinking about it, it’s getting even hotter. I have to talk to someone, here so as to divert my mind, even for a little.

“Hey, Kouenji!”

“Ah! Beautiful! To be able to walk calmly surrounded by nature! This is just perfect... The ultimate beauty!”

It’s hopeless. I cannot have a proper conversation with him, now. Actually,

there is nobody around that I can have a substantial conversation with.

“This is remarkable!”

“Eh?...”

I thought that I heard just fragments of a voice behind me, as Sakura leapt beside me.

“You said that you wanted one more person, so I raised my hand. There are a lot of things that I can help with”

“When the team said they needed another one member and I raised my hand.. You thought she is not ready to do it”

“I did not think anything in particular, really, not at all... why are you bringing this up, now? It is somehow confusing”

Sakura is a docile character, but somehow she did not seem to back out from this conversation. When we began this trip as a school trip, she seemed to be rather passive. I thought that Sakura would excuse herself, but although her shyness was apparent, we continued walking side by side.

Walking from the beach towards the woods, in other words, to move towards the inner part of the island, suddenly steals away a lot of our stamina. This is not a simple, convenient route, it gets a lot worse and cranky on the road. It looks like walking on a long winding hill road.

“So, why did you raise your hand in order to participate in a troublesome exploration of the woods?”

“Well.... Because there are a large number of people in the camp, I feel uncomfortable”

“I really do not understand your feeling, even when there are few people, still it is not enjoyable”

Now, it looks like it is the time to talk to someone, even If I become a little unpleasant.

“But.... Ayanokouji, you raised your hand, too, after all”.

Sakura raised her head and made a happy face, then looking rather confused,

made gestures with her hands and protested in a loud voice.

“It’s not that.... It’s not like that! It’s just that there are not many people that I can talk to, that’s what I mean”

Sakura kept denying with fervor while walking in a hurry when...

“Hey!... Be careful!”

“Ouch”

As she was talking to me looking back and forth, her foot was grabbed by a root from a large tree, causing her to fall backwards. Hurriedly I reached with my hands to grab her, but I ended up not being in time.

“Are you alright?”

“ Erm... It hurts a little”

Thankfully, she landed on her hands rather than her bottom, it was careless but not something serious.

“If you do not walk carefully in the woods, you might get hurt, hey now, hold my hand”

“Ah... Thank you”

Without any more excuses Sakura offered her hand but then she realised it was dirty by her fall, she drew it back. Ignoring this, I grabbed her hand, anyway, holding it tenderly.

“I’m.... I’m sorry”

“It is not like you have to apologise over something like this”

Thoughtfully, I brushed off the soil from Sakura’s hands. Anyway, this forest, it looks like it is the first time that people have set foot in this place. In the beginning I thought we had a level of direction walking in the woods. But, now I feel like this was a wrong guess.

First and foremost, we cannot always walk straightforward. We should be climbing to overcome natural obstacles. By all means, following a compulsory route that does not change we go no left or right . This situation continues for many more minutes, I feel like I am forgetting myself, which route we were

supposed to take. The vanguard keeps pushing forward to a degree that I can barely see Kouenji, anymore.

However, Sakura does not seem that she wants to keep going, staring hazily at my left hand, where I held her.

“Sakura! We have to hurry up a little”

“Eh?! Uh, yeah!”

Confused by my sudden remark, she started running. I guess it cannot be helped again....

“He sure walks fast, that Kouenji”.

Kouenji without thinking at all, about the pace of a girl, he kept walking deeper into the forest. Ignoring that he leads us steadily into unfamiliar territory. On an unknown path, there is nothing to do but rely on our feet and stamina and admire the obedience.

“Nevertheless, he would never....”

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing”

What is the meaning of this. Is this a coincidence? No! There is no hesitation in Kouenji’s pace. For example, we chose the place for our base camp in discretion for the sake of the whole team. How is it normal for someone to walk straight forward without looking left or right in unfamiliar territory?. It is like that Kouenji has a pretty clear aim on his mind. Above all the quick progress on the route surprised me. There is a chance that Kouenji just not push forward blindly.

“I will turn my ideals into a path” So I do not get lost willingly.

But there is a problem here. I have to accompany Sakura into matching Kouenji’s pace, so I take a deep breath and move forward.

“Hey Kouenji! Don’t you think we’ve come too far away from our base?, We might get lost out here!”

Sakura looked both my way and Kouenji’s looking concerned as I called out to

him. Kouenji's silhouette stopped and turned our way to face us, as he fixed a strand of his hair.

"I am a genius with the perfect physical ability, there is no way that I will get us lost in a forest of this size. If anything might happen to you that's because you might have lost sight of me and then let's be honest, it would be better if you'd give up"

As I would expect of him, maybe with the exception of myself to make a declaration as a man. The situation around here is not entertaining at all.

"I would like to ask you, ordinary people, don't you think that this is truly beautiful?"

Thinking that he showed us of his perfect nature as always, Kouenji flashed us a daring smile, asking us that question.

"Well.... It is only natural for the forest to be a mysterious place, although, I mostly feel that it is beautiful"

More or less this is how I felt and tried to transmit it. However, Kouenji did not expect this kind of reply, feeling a little disappointed he took a deep breath.

"What are you talking about? This is not what I asked you about! Having a perfect physical condition, myself, I can shine beautifully in this place. You do not understand?

So when you have a perfect body physique, you have to make self proclamation remarks about your body abilities.. Ah, you are right, then. I do not understand.

"Blame it on the heat, it makes the head feel weird..... do not mind that, Sakura"

"Uh, yes, it's ok because Kouenji has been acting weird from the start"

Oh! Even though that is the truth, to say such a severe thing so easily, seriously this kid...

Kouenji decided to test my physical capabilities some other time, so he turned his back and continued walking. From this point onwards I should not fuss over advices or wishes.

"There is no need to worry, whatever happens in this forest more or less there won't be any problem"

"Kouenji, what is the meaning of this?"

"I cannot call this a natural forest. At least during daytime, the chances of getting lost while wandering around are pretty low. For this very reason, there is a certain level of curiosity"

He left the conversation hanging with significant words. Kouenji, having lost his interest in us some time ago has started walking again at a quick pace. In a quick pace that Sakura could not follow.

"Hey!!"

"Well.. Ermmm. I am feeling better, so I will try my best to continue"

Sakura while sweating, decided to show that she has guts and raised a fist pump. It kind of draws a feeling that it is quite dangerous.

The worst thing is Kouenji's resolution, but Sakura starting from now on, putting aside her wishes to endure, followed Kouenji's pace. Sometimes the figure became too shabby, it is dangerous, but we have to persevere on our own determination for both of our sakes. I do not mind this kind of a painful effort, but Kouenji keeps stubbornly pushing forward. Even though I thought that we would not stop unless we get out of the woods, suddenly he stopped in front of my eyes and turned his head towards this way, pulling his hair upwards with a fearless smile.

"Can I give a question to you ordinary people?"

Then, before we even get to reply, Kouenji, continued

"Won't you let me hear you of what do you think of this place? What kind of feeling do you get when looking at this around you?"

"Eh? What.. What is the meaning of this question, Ayanokouji?" Suddenly Kouenji's sharp glance got hidden by Sakura's back as she came closer to listen.

What feeling this place is giving me? Let me see the surroundings, look around the area, first. However, there is nothing anything really odd about this place. It looks like an ordinary forest. Purposely trying to get some kind of

confirmation, what is that he is trying to do.

“I understand clearly, do not worry, ordinary people will just remain ordinary”

Again, not getting a reply Kouenji once again turned his back and continue his pace into the forest.

“Did I do something... odd?”

“No”

There's really no end if you start taking into consideration of Kouenji's remarks. He is a man of many lies. But he is still in denial of the possibility that we cannot see what he sees in this place and there is no time for us to search this place at ease. Kouenji once again picked up his pace.

“Sakura do you have a handkerchief?”

“Ah! Yes, I have”

As I would expect from a girl, she prepared handy things.

“Is it ok with you, to lend it to me? It may get dirty.”

“It is perfectly ok....”

As she said this without any objections, Sakura gave me her handkerchief.

I borrowed it gratefully and tied it up to a tree nearby, on a branch that wouldn't break easily. Doing so we will also mark it and it'll be useful for when we'll return this place later.

“Ahh, I lost sight of Kouenji-kun...hurry up, Ayanokoji-kun!”

Sakura was getting anxious but, as exhaustion was accumulating, I tripped and nearly fell. After all, Sakura's physical strength was already close to the limit. Even if I pushed myself, I wouldn't be able to keep up as well.

“Sorry but this is a bit too physically demanding. Do you mind if we walk a bit slowly?”

That said, I was the first to slow down the pace. Sakura wasn't really sorry, she just used a pretext on this. I've probably seen right through her but it doesn't matter, because there's no way to confirm the truth.

Whether he could hear my voice or not, before long we couldn't see Kouenji anymore. From far ahead, sometimes I could hear a sound of someone pushing through the high grass and stepping firmly on the ground.

"What an all-rounder, I am"

With an excellent intelligent and an incredible nervus motorius, I can adapt perfectly to a nature like in this wood without even flinching, and with a partner too.

If I had a personality similar to Hirata's, I'd been an ultra perfect superman.

Sakura's gaze, who observed the situation silently since before, became uneasy.

Eventually, Sakura didn't say anything to me and we walked together in the wood to explore.

"It'll be great if we can secure drinking water. Or it'd be better to first secure a place where we can shelter ourselves from the elements?"

Since I have nothing to fill my time with, I'll try to speak to her gently. So that it's easy for her to understand. If you can secure a spot, there's the possibility of saving points, and it'd be an extremely easy expansion.

"Well, 2 tents won't be enough...but I can't come up with anything else"

No matter how much I look out over the landscape and walk, I can't even find one man-made thing. Well, even if we say we're walking all around, it can be confirmed that we're seeing an area of only the 1% of the island. This school probably isn't lenient enough to spoil us with easy-to-find stuff in a small-scale search.

And then a few minutes later, when going ahead while walking on a way without a proper road, a new place opened halfway.

"This here.....isn't it a road?"

"It looks like it"

From the woods that were on the desert island, a road came out appearing to

cut out a path for people. Of course, it wasn't paved but there was trace of chopped down trees and a well-beaten path. If this is something that the school did for us, beyond this point there may possibly be a spot.

I proceeded to the next steps with Sakura and we took the road that cut through the woods.

"Wow.....Amazing....."

Soon we reached a place. It was the entrance of a cave, empty and unoccupied, built as a large gaping hole in a part of the mountain. At first sight, it seemed like a natural cave, but when you looked at it closely the inside of the cave seemed to be firmly enforced and supported. Maybe the hole itself might have been created by human hands.

"Could it be.....a spot, possibly?"

"Well, I'm not sure"

Since time immemorial, caves have fulfilled an outstanding function as people's dwellings. If this is the place designated as a spot, there should be an evidence or proof inscribed somewhere.

When I tried to approach the cave to confirm and check this, I saw a man coming out from the inner depths of the hole.

Immediately, I pulled Sakura's arm, retracting in the shade and hiding. I feel sorry for her and I hope she will forgive me for pulling her abruptly because I've already seen the figure. When the man stopped at the entrance, he stood quietly facing the southwest direction without moving. Did he stand there for a minute or two?

Without wasting any time, this is how you should secure a spot promptly. It seemed like he came straight into the cave without hesitation. However, apart from that, the problem is that the man gripped something similar to a card tightly in his hand. Then, a voice directed to the man could be heard from inside. I retracted immediately in a fluster.

"If this is the size of the cave, two tents are enough, Katsuragi-san. Even so, we were just lucky. We got to hold down such a spot this quickly"

I listened carefully, trying to grasp the situation from a faint voice I was hearing.

“Luck? What have you seen until now? I’ve figured out there’s a cave here since before landing. It was inevitable to find it. Be wary of words and deeds. We don’t know if someone’s eavesdropping on us somewhere. I have a responsibility as a leader. Let’s keep in mind not to do even a slightest mistake.”

“... S, sorry. But what does it mean since before landing...?”

“For some reason, before the ship was attached to the pier it went around the island’s outer circumference to make a detour. It was probably an act of the school to give students some hints on where to proceed because I’ve already seen the road that opened to the forest from the deck of the ship. All they had to do later is to go forward the shortest route from the landing pier to the road.”

“So, rather than just an ordinary sightseeing, isn’t there a possibility that was a forethought to enjoy the scenery?”

“The turn was too far for a sightseeing. Besides, the content of the announcement was strange.”

“I could not feel it at all but... Katsuragi-san has seen through the school’s intentions. Because of that he realized there is a cave here... As expected!”

“Let’s move to the next one, Yahiko. It’s useless to stay longer since the spot has been seized. There was a road seen from the ship from two more places. Before that, there must be something like a facility.”

“Y-yes! But if you leave the result like this, Sakayanagi has no choice but to be silent!”

“When you turn your eyes on the inside, be careful or you’ll trip.”

“That’s right, but shouldn’t we be cautious of B class? Isn’t D class an assembly of defectives? Even if we think about the point difference, we can ignore it.”

There was a similar story on the ship as well that D class was out of consideration to A class. We were treated like a stone dropped on the corner of

the roadside.

“Enough with the chit-chat. Let’s go Yahiko.”

I waited until I couldn’t hear the voices and footsteps of the two. Then I waited two minutes more for caution’s sake.

“They left...”

I took a quick look to check, but I couldn’t see the two from a little while ago. I noticed that the weight of the warmth on my hands had become heavier as I’d caught my breath. I kept suppressing it after I’d embraced it in a hurry.

“Sorry Sakura... Sakura?”

“Mmm.....!?”

Sakura was somehow there, exhausted and half-conscious.

“Are, are you okay?”

“O, o, o, k, okay, ay ay...”

Her face turned red as if the steam was about to rise from her body, sitting helplessly on that place. Perhaps she was held down with a much stronger force than I thought.

“Ouch, ou, ou... I thought I died... And my heart stopped...”

That was as one would expect as exaggerated. Sakura’s breathing stabilized as she fixed her slippery glasses.

“Those two before. It looks like they’re from A class based on their conversation.”

However, to abandon this place and leave is what I was worried about. There was also a possibility that the spot might be usurped unless we let someone to stand guard.

After we waited for Sakura’s stamina to return, we went to the entrance of the cave once again. In other words, they left this place without hesitation...

Inside the cave a terminal device with a monitor was installed, embedded in the wall. There was a letter of an A class on the screen and a countdown displaying 7 hours 55 minutes left.

Was it a proof of owning a spot? We can absolutely not interfere until the countdown reaches zero. It is also impossible to forcibly use this place. That's why the two from A class have peacefully left the place. No – the problem wasn't only that.

As long as it keeps being updated without being deprived of the ownership points of other classes, A class will keep acquiring one point every eight hours as well. Although people would lose 30 points for absence due to sickness sick, more than half of them will decide to call it quits.

Moreover, it looked like the guy named Katsuragi was still figuring out a few facilities as well. Can other classes establish a lead again if it's a spot with food and water?

"I said to put it in a corner of your head since before landing on the island..."

They remembered a terrain of the island and used it as a hint to find out the spot. That idea was brilliant.

As might be expected, being in A class means that even the world you can see, in its minimal necessities, is different. However, points that are hard to swallow appear like that as well.

"Hey, hey, Ayanokouji-kun. The person before ... is he a leader....?"

Right — this incident was a proof that a fatal mistake was made. Although it was in order to securely seize the cave, A class passed a key card in order to obtain point ownership. It became clearly known to us know that he is the leader. Of course, he didn't think someone from the other class will be watching... It's clearly inadvertent. Just to be sure we've examined the inside of the cave, but as expected the people were not hiding.

"Wha, wha, what should we do. We've found a terrible secret...!"

Said Sakura, a little excitedly as she'd heard the information that gives a heavy blow to A class.

"We'll report it to Hirata later."

I've let Sakura, who's a poor talker, relieved as I said she doesn't need to report it herself.

The situation around began to move, without bearing any results Hirata's team returned to base. The trio was surprisingly in an uplifting mood. Hirata and the others were talking about something with great fervor.

"It is a river!! A river!! What a beautiful feeling it is! It looks like there is an equipment! It seems that we will be able to have an exclusive possession of a mechanism! From here it is only a ten minute walk, so let's go all together at once."

Ike's team had left earlier for a search mission, they may have found out that spot already. And it seemed that they were guarding it so that other classes won't snatch it away.

"This is a glorious achievement, if we can maintain the source of the river, our situation may vastly improve."

It seems like as we came to find this spot originally, it was already decided that this would be the place of our base camp. Of course I thought it was because of the terrain and the environment, but it seems that it is just the first step forward.

"Still, there are 2 teams that haven't returned yet, I guess it will be a trouble if no one stays here to wait for them"

The clock showed that it was almost 3 o'clock, we might not be able to hold on the original schedule, besides, there are countless possibilities of where they could be wandering in this vast forest.

"I'm sorry Hirata, Kouenji, too, because it is my fault, in the middle of our expedition, I trailed off the road"

"Ah, If you are talking about our little Kouenji, he returned alone a little while ago, he wanted to go and swim"

It seems that he did not get lost, but he sneaked away out of the forest. Something that would be expected from a free-spirited guy like him.

"How did we lose him? Did you not take your leadership properly?"

"I am who I am and I am not someone who would put restraints on people..... Do you understand?"

This guy, is he trying to agitate him on purpose? I have succeeded in breaking free from Kouenji's haste pace already and also being well-informed about the forest.

"I get it, a leader other than showing personality has no ability to answer in complaints, that's him"

"You are just like him"

"Did you say something?"

"No, nothing"

There are too many problematic students, including me in this class. Hirata, too, is troubling.

"What?"

Suddenly Horikita, turned around and looked back. She glared at Sakura with sharp eyes.

"Eh?!"

"Just, now, did she look at me?"

"S..She.. She was not looking at me, right?!"

Sakura looked confused and being in denial, trying to run away from the view, she took her distance from us.

"Do not let her scare you. From the beginning Horikita was scary as a demon, anyway."

"So that I allow her to mess with me as she pleases?"

"This is the place! We have found the spot! It is amazing!"

We finally arrived to the spot that was found by Ike and the others. To the interior of the cave I saw a mechanism embedded in the wall.

However, to this edge of the river, there is one artificial big boulder. This is where the mechanism was originally embedded. Meanwhile, Hirata's team started preparing the tent and all other necessities to a place close to the river.

"Yes, the sunlight cast its shadows in the beautiful water. Smoothing the way

below ground. This might be an ideal spot to build our base camp. This is fantastic, Ike!"

"He he! I know, right?"

The waters of the river run calmly in a width of 10 meters, creating such a splendid sight. The river is surrounded by the thick forest and a sand road. It feels like this place was already established and opened before. I do not believe that this is a newly discovered site. This was built by our school for a specific aim.

"What kind of verification do we need to prove that this river is ours now...".

The river has a great width, it goes extremely downstream from this point onward and it seems like it continues that way.

At one glance towards the end of it, we are standing at the flat point that seems to be the only exception in a place where the difference between high and low is really extreme. Maybe there is not another place as well as this one around here.

However, we came to find this place too easily. We don't even know if there is a possibility for us to actually somehow use the river. Or possibly, we thought too simply that we have a special right to hold this spot.

We only worried about one thing, while walking parallel to the riverside to the direction of the forest. Yet, somehow, we came to hold the north canal.

"It is just like understanding the vicinity around the school. It seems like we are the only ones who can make use of the river"

Along our way, as we were walking down along the river that we thought we could use, there was a sign of old wood. So this place was designed specifically for a reason after all and unauthorized use is prohibited. This is what is written on the wooden sign.

Feeling light-headed as we were walking around, Hirata and his team came back.

"Concerning the decision to build our base camp on this spot, is there a not problem at all about occupying this spot?"

"We already decided on that! Is there any other alternatives, anyway?!"

"There are! Of course, having this place is to our benefit, there are ways to monopolise the river and we can gain some points for doing so, if we can actually hold it for 8 hours and the operation is approved and executed by our leader. However, if other teams found out who our leader actually is, we will be in trouble. Someone with clever eyes might grasp the gravity of our situation"

Across the river and all around us, in 360 degrees there is only the forest. If there is someone or something looking at us from the trees, then we would not notice.

"You mean..., this place... it is not good for hiding, we are unprotected. We are surrounded"

It is true that risk has cast its shadow, but, Ike's observation is accurate.

Even if we make the base camp on this terrain, we cannot maintain it, there are no options. If by any chance the students of some other classes try to monopolize the river, we will not be able to get out.

Girls and boys alike seem to give Ike their approval. I think that Hirata, too, from the start had the intention to do the same thing, but, from sticking to a neutral position has gathered a lot of viewpoints.

Certainly to be able to earn the right of an exclusive possession is somehow like a two-edged knife.

However, in order for Class A to monopolize the cave, they have to protect the equipments fully by stacking them up/by placing them one upon another in the same location of the base camp. It's a no brainer that B class and also C class will do the same thing. In other words, we cannot afford to lose ground even for the slightest risk.

"Yes. So after this issue, the new point is who is going to be the leader?"

More than taking possession and occupying spots, the big key factor is deciding who will be appointed as the leader.

Making mistakes on this point can possibly become fatal.

While everyone was thinking of avoiding this kind of role with such heavy

responsibilities, Kushida told everyone to gather and make a circle. In a small voice, she began:

"I had a lot on my mind and I thought about various things but, whether one likes it or not, Hirata-kun or Karuizawa-san stand out as persons. But isn't a leader one that you could rely on and also one that has a deep sense of responsibility? I think that Horikita-san is the one that meets both conditions. How about that?"

Horikita looked like she didn't expect this kind of recommendation from Kushida, but her expression didn't change. I wonder if it's less risky to let her act as a leader since she's always observing and aiming for A class than to let someone else do it. I think the main point is there. I was calmly looking at the reactions around me.

"I agree with Kushida-san's opinion. I also think that Horikita-san can be a good leader. So long as Horikita-san is okay with it too, I would like her to take over later"

Even though all the gazes gathered on her, she didn't particularly appear as she wanted to refuse it.

"You don't want to do it, right? Don't force her. I can do it instead"

Suddenly, Sudo announced his candidature, doubtful as to whether Horikita had decided not to take over. But ironically, that became a trigger for Horikita as she soon made a cool decision.

"Ok, I accept"

Even if it's a little troublesome, I'm relieved since this is more secure than having Sudo or Ike as leader.

As soon as he heard those words, Hirata immediately went to Miss Chabashira to pass on Horikita's name. Before long, he received the card and entrusted it to Horikita when he came back.

But of course, before this, taking into consideration the risk of being seen by someone nearby, everyone touched the device. This was to camouflage the leader and to not let anyone find out the real one.

“Okay, I resolved the problem of the bath and the drinking water”

With shining and flaming eyes, Ike advocated to economize on points.

“Huh? With things like drinking water from the river? Are you crazy?”

Apparently, Ike intended to use the river’s water both as a natural bath and drinking water. Meanwhile, Shinohara and the girls seemed to not to have such idea and they glanced at the river both disgusted and appalled.

“Well, it looks nice for swimming.....but to drink...mmm”

“What’s the matter, it’s completely fine. It’s pure and clean water”

“Yeah, that’s.....it seems it can certainly be drunk but....”

Shinohara pulled Hirata’s sleeve after seeing how Ike didn’t stop appealing for saving points in every way.

“Hey, Hirata-kun.....is it really okay? It is not normal to drink water from the river”

Several girls gathered and they came to talk to Hirata uneasily, asking for advice. Watching the gently flowing river waters, the girls protested shaking their heads left and right and saying it was impossible.

“I don’t think I could drink that....”

Ike, who was looking surreptitiously at the consultation going on, opened his mouth already growing irritated.

“Is that so? The water is really clean and transparent and it looks like natural water”

Although it wasn’t turbid or muddy, not only all the girls but also part of the boys remained on the sidelines and watched some parts of the river.

“What’s going on, everyone. What’s your beef? There’s no reason we shouldn’t make use of the available water we found with so much trouble”

“Well then we should try to drink it as an experiment”

“Haha....whatever, I don’t care....”

Ike scooped up the river water with his hands and drank it. Part of the girls

were urged to do it forcibly too.

"Aaahhk....It's ice-cold and I'm chilled to the bone but it's good! Damn good!"

"Wow that's a major turn-off. No way I'm drinking that. Yuck!"

"Ehh? You told me to drink it, SHINOHARA!"

"No way! The type I hate the most are barbarian guys like you"

"What the..."

The two were also glaring to each other and they threw off sparks during their heated argument.

"I heard that the closer you are the more you fight, could this be applicable to both of them?"

"Well, it seems to be true"

So next to the toilet's issue, wouldn't it be logic to resolve the drinking water's problem? But even if a river has been found for it, there hasn't been any solution yet.

"For the time being, why don't we think about the water's problem later? Because if you fight it's gonna be even harder to resolve"

Hirata told everyone that he wanted to break through the current situation. Probably delaying the situation will bring other problems but if that's Hirata intention, there won't be a particular objection. Or so I believed...until a guy that I least expected put a stop to the flow of the conversation.

"Shinohara, don't complain. It's a trial where everyone has to cooperate together, that is what!!"

Sudo is the class problem child. But unusually, he put Shinohara in her place in a cool and calm tone.

"Oh please, don't make me laugh. Do you cooperate yourself with everyone, like you said, Sudo-kun?"

Shinohara smiled contrived like she has lower abdominal pains, but it's impossible for her to take up this stupid attitude. Sudo, after getting into

school, he often got into trouble and stirred problems in the class. Very differently compared to Horikita, he's very far from cooperative. It seemed like Sudo himself was the first to be aware of it, but he continued to have the same attitude without changing behaviour.

"I know that I caused trouble for the class. That's why I'm saying this. If you provoke somebody's antipathy by being boring and tiresome like this, it will come back to you (what goes around comes back around)"

"What ..that's why Sudo-kun doesn't want to use the point right?"

"No one said such a thing. Kanji, just cool down a little. If you're told by others to suddenly drink the river's water, it should be normal for you to feel that you have the right to resist and protest. I'd feel the same too. Hey, if you boil the water, you can sterilize it, right? Why don't you try that for the time being?"

"Boiling... It's not a chemistry experiment. Stop with the proper remarks said in the spur of the moment"

Shinohara was prepared to fight with anyone who displeased her, and was aggressive towards Sudou as well.

Hirata called out to settle down the intensifying argument for the second time.

"Let's end this for once. We still have time so there's no need to decide things in a hurry."

As if those words made her a little calmer, Shinohara silently withdrawn. Shortly afterwards, Hirata went to Ms. Chabashira to apply for a provisional toilet.

Without containing the anger towards Shinohara's words and deeds, Ike left the situation behind biting his lips in frustration all the way.

"Crap, what's wrong with Shinohara? It's not only that she doesn't work hard."

Annoyingly, Ike picked up a pebble and threw it to drain in the river.

The stone kicked water surface five-six times and jumped to the other side of the shore without difficulty. For something picked by chance, it had a beautiful

form. It wouldn't have worked so well, if he only learned to do it by watching others.

"Are you unexpectedly good at outdoor stuff perhaps?"

"Huh? Ah – no, it's not like that. I was just often camping with my family when I was little. There's no danger in drinking river water. I'd know if the water is clean and hygienic."

Rather than being boastful, he really spoke as if it's a natural thing.

"Wouldn't it be better if you came forward with your camping experience from the beginning? If you had gained people's trust I think you could have carried it a little better."

It wasn't acceptable to just act as one pleases without any explanation, even if you had abilities. Not to mention that wasn't something to be clearly understood unlike the test score.

"If I did boy scouting, I could brag about it. Having just a camping experience isn't something to boast about. Even if I said something, it would be in vain anyway."

Somehow, he looked discouraged by the girls' harsh criticism. Judging from Ike, whose usual thoughts were about being well liked by girls only, it was natural for him to be dissatisfied. However, it seems like the situation would have been be really different if he'd only change manners a little.

To only slightly see Ike and Hirata cooperating and leading the class would feel precious.

But... Ike added, a little dry of words:

"Everyone seemed excited to start this kind of camping life. I thought everyone had some experience. I may have been a little unreasonable thinking that way."

That was the first time Ike showed us his regret. It was a moment where we became aware of his error.

"Sorry. I have to think of a good solution. I'm going to take a bath in the river."

That being said, Ike stood up and turned his back on me. I thought that was good for now. His head must have been clouded and confused due to the heat and to look everywhere for this place must have taken a considerable amount of physical strength.

“Ayanokouji-kun. Can you follow him?”

“Huh? Why?”

After we couldn’t see Ike anymore, Horikita who was beside me said:

“His knowledge might be useful. That is, it might be necessary for D class. He also knows how to walk around the forest to some extent as well as outdoor knowledge. Since Kouenji-kun is useless, it’s necessary for him to somehow pull the class.”

“You don’t think you can persuade him by yourself?”

As if she didn’t think such a thing would be told, she said upsettingly:

“Me? Persuade? Him? You think I can do it?”

Even though she appealed to me for the thing she couldn’t do with a smug face, I could see she was worried. She is truly a fitting example that building human relationships relies heavily on the abilities of ordinary people.

“I’m asking because I know that’s impossible. Can I rely on you?”

“Well, I guess so. You don’t have anyone else to rely on but me.”

Even if the expectations were the lowest, if the others were all zero, I had to become the top inevitably.

“As someone who isn’t usually to be relied on, Ayanokouji-kun – you’re happy deep down, right?”

It was great of her that she could boldly ask a favor while crossing her arms proudly.

“I understand. I’ll call out to him indirectly. But please, leave the timing to me.”

“... Good. Cause I’m not certain if it’s the best to call out to him now.”。

I stepped aside as to let her know that I accepted, without any particular

conversation beside that one. I wonder if Horikita will fully realize the hardships of being alone to the extent of hating it during this week. I think she herself is an excellent person, but only if you consider her individually.

In case of pursuing your own grades only, you will keep on running silently for the top without relying on anyone, but this trial is a good example that there are things that cannot be done by yourself.

Probably, Horikita fully realized for the first time now that she is powerless. If that weren't the case, it's unlikely she'd rely on me so quickly. If we had no friends, no one would drop by to visit and we couldn't even talk to someone. If we cannot communicate, we cannot cooperate and trust each other. A talented woman who looks perfect within the school will become less than an ordinary student in this situation.

"... The school probably calculated the space of that area too."

Although that's also the point where you could see the bottom of Horikita Suzune's limitations.

Because it's impossible to break away from the rules this school made.

Across the distance you could see a little, the two completed tents standing side by side. While talking together with the other girls, Shinohara held up a gourd-shaped war fan. Both of the tents were exclusive to the girls. In other words, the boys, now, were simply sleeping outdoors so that they could become stronger with this experience.

I feel that the majority of our classmates have never slept outdoors before. Luckily, it is summer and although there is no wind blowing, make no mistake there are still some hardships to endure. Sometimes it is troublesome as bugs are targeting our hands and feet and when it gets dark the visibility around is quite bad. Especially in the grass under our feet, mysterious bugs are jumping and flying around creating an ominous feeling.

Being a child of the city, all this seemed repulsive to me. Spending a whole week on this bed, already seems impossible. But from understanding Ike's views of point consumption, it is different and requires the utmost resistance and the ability of a person to take action.

When the bugs from the ground came to bed, then we changed the sheets. We were even discussing if we should cut down some branches from the trees around. We should really figure out what to do, instead of absurdly praying for something to happen.

Hirata, after finishing the tent for the girls, came towards us while wiping the sweat off from his forehead.

“Ehm... Ayanokouji, if it is ok, could I talk to you for a minute?”

With this low profile behaviour and an almost apologetic look, he continued talking to me.

“Coming out to meet me with the flashlight at night is quite eerie. We may agree or not how we use or not use points, but, apart from that, I believe that it is necessary to make sure that we have light at night-time. However, that cannot be done just with Ayanokouji’s persistence.”

Certainly I wanted to avoid having no light at all in the night. It was a pain if you had to go to the toilet at night-time. I wanted to hear what we should have done about it. After thinking about it a little, Hirata said.

“In this area, we can make a bonfire. We can look for branches and pick them up from the trees around us”

We have many guys here, we can rely on them into undertaking such a task.

“Well, then, let’s go find the right ones to help.”

“Thank you! Ah, but do not go alone, it is dangerous, it would be better if you take someone else with you.”

As we reached to that conclusion, I had to search for a partner. Standing still on that spot, gazing up at the sky I found Horikita. As she caught me looking at her, she started walking towards me.

“You are usually uncooperative, but now you are really easy-going, granting his favour.”

“I only heard about his request to you, anyway one way or another Hirata can save himself from this somehow. The details are not a part of our work. Just the working part.”

A part of the students will voluntary mobilize and work in order to help the class. The position of the caste system in the class will change depending on whether or not you can make a successful move in such times.

"He is comparatively at the centre of the class, so that is why he can't accept to rely on you."

"For good or for worse, D class relies on Hirata and Karuizawa. With the exception of these two members, if we unify the strength of other people, it is nonexistent and imcompetent"

Standing beside me Horikita expressed clearly the situation of the class about its ability and talent but, some other abilities like generosity and dignity, we are lacking of them to the point that it could be fatal for us. It is true, even for myself, I do not think that I possess these two important abilities.

Already causing a stir, Kushida said that she was overexerting herself since she couldn't afford to bear the brunt of following troubles around. Even now, somewhere, she was doing something with strenuous effort.

"What if you would become Hirata's assistant? Moreover, for the class' sake, you'd rather do it for yourself."

"Me, his assistant? Don't joke with this! If that is the case, then I'd rather have the skill of a mongoose"

"The skill of a mongoose?..."

No matter what I am going to say now, it feels kind of offensive for Hirata, no, it is definitely offensive.

"It is just a joke! How he is different or not from a mongoose, well, that's another story. This time, there is nothing on which I can become stronger. I have to think if there is a clear goal. Not only about myself, but to think on how to use the points. To what degree can we use the points or how exactly. I still don't have an answer for that."

Talking quietly, we went our separate ways and I found myself close to the tent that was just being set up. For the time being I am searching for an easy-going partner to go together for branches. Looking for one into the guys circle I head for the riverbank and I see Sudou gazing up at the sky. I wonder if it was

him who followed Ike previously, or perhaps he had become a guy to rely on after all. He might actually take action and do something in order to help a friend in need.

“Hey, Sudou... We need to make a bonfire, so we have to pick up some branches, will you help me?”

“Ehhh... What’s up with that? If it is a troublesome task, I think I’ll pass”.

He told me that without making a move to get up at all. But, not being in the mood to search for another partner, I persisted further.

“It may be troublesome, but we are going to gather around here close to the camp.”

“That is exactly what a troublesome task is, I am sorry, but I prefer to swim in the water. Standing up, he took the bag that was placed beside me and head for the water.

“Well... If that’s the case.”

As I was denied, earlier I noticed a couple of girls chatting close to the tent with Yamauchi, so I decided to ask him.

“We need branches so that we can have a bonfire, I will go and pick up a few, but, could someone come and help me?”

“Eh... I smell trouble... Look, Kanji’s team and I found a good spot, right? Our minds are occupied right now, so I am really tired. Sorry but, I’ll pass. Let me rest.”

Being dumped like that, I didn’t feel like having to answer him in a strong manner. It is too bothersome. As things are going, my chances about ending up with a companion that I can rely on and actually talk to, is close to zero. Horikita is not in the right “condition” for me to ask her a favour. Kushida will be all out on the girls’ team, anyway.

“In the end.... I am alone.”

Just in time that I made the decision to head towards the woods all alone, just like she was peeking at my situation, Sakura appeared.

“Erm... Is it ok if I go with you?

It was like she had overheard my conversation that I had earlier and understood my situation.

"Eh?.. I am thankful, but are you sure it's alright with you? Because you look tired, maybe it would be better for you to rest."

Sakura just earlier had accompanied me in a search in the woods. So, she must be tired already and she should not force herself further.

"I will be alright. But if I am left here... well... It feels a bit discomforting."

While saying that, she turned her back to the girls of our class. I feel like Sakura's situation resembles my own. Having to live in a community, as a part of a team made us feel bitter.

"Well, then let's go."

Since Kouenji is not with us, we can take it easy and I match my pace with Sakura's.

"Hey!"

As soon as we were ready to enter the woods, I heard a voice behind us calling us to halt and someone rushed immediately towards us.

"I thought that I could help, too!"

Yamauchi appeared in front of us even before we had time to decide, however, I feel like his idea of coming together with us is rather odd.

"Eh?... Is it ok?"

"Hey, come on, now. When in trouble, it is the time for a friend to come to the rescue, right? Sakura?

"Eh? Ye... yes."

Looking like she is shrinking, Sakura hid behind my back and bowed her head in agreement. Yamauchi did not make any actual conversation with her, but it is a good chance for Sakura to increase her circle of friends.

We decided to collect branches in the vicinity so that we're not too distant from the base camp. In a place not too far away from the camp, the three of us spread out picking up branches.

"Hey, look, Ayanokouji. I want you to keep this a secret between you and me."

Yamauchi, holding a branch in his hand, approached me whispering into my ear:

"I... am thinking of having my eyes on Sakura."

"Huh?"

"Nah, isn't Kushida-chan on a higher level? Her communication skills are also superb. That's why I was thinking of giving up on that eminent target on this occasion. Compared to her, Sakura can't get used to guys at all as if she's bad with people on purpose. To be honest, I was thinking of going as far as I can go on this trip. Perhaps that girl will fall for a guy who's kind and caring. I will go after her until I get a kiss at least. No, really. It's okay if it's Sakura on this occasion. No – Sakura's good!"

"On this occasion... You haven't been involved even once with Sakura until now. It's quite unexpected."

"Nah, look, I feel sorry for not seeing it earlier. She didn't catch my attention because she is plain, but she's really cute. Is she an idol? Her breasts are already at their finest. Even when she wears a jersey you can see them completely, it's very noticeable." He started doing massage movements while having naughty thoughts.

His reason for suddenly feeling like helping out was that, it seems. It looked like a backup measure after giving up on his favorite Kushida. I can't think of Sakura being pleased with that. I wished for an event to happen where Yamauchi would start liking Sakura for real.

"So please, help me. For instance, you could leave us to be alone from now."

"I'm not saying I'll help you with that..."

"What? Are you after Sakura maybe? Those boobies!"

Why are there so many guys who look at things so nastily? I wasn't going to deny Yamauchi's feelings particularly. After all, breasts size are women's charm and their attractiveness is biologically explained too. I don't mind cheering and

helping out if necessary. But unlike Kushida, Sakura is not used to interacting with men in any case. It would be a different story if this was him just purely wanting to become friends with her, but I can't let her suddenly be alone with a guy who's after the opposite sex. If Yamauchi acts recklessly, there will be no chance with Sakura.

"Please, give it up for now. I will cooperate when I get closer with Sakura. Besides, I'd like to go back and try to set a bonfire properly while it's still early. Alright?"

Yamauchi dropped his shoulders in disappointment, but recovered his mood quickly.

"It's really hard. Well, whatever. Since you have Horikita you don't need to worry, Ayanokouji."

Since when do I have Horikita?

"Look – let's just collect the branches properly. I'll start diligently picking them up over there too."

With that being said, he pushed the collected branches towards me. Some of them fell from his hands on the ground. I regretted a little, thinking I might have done something bad to Sakura. Although the cause might be in Kouenji leading, there was a possibility that he felt agony being together with me for a good amount of time. He isn't the one who will say it out loud.

After Sakura warned the two of us, we collected branches almost silently in the end.

"We have enough already, haven't we? It's enough for today, right?"

That was right, we have collected even more than enough amount today.

With Yamauchi's remark, the three of us finished collecting branches and started heading back to the camp.

"Hey, hey, Sakura. Would you like me to help you with carrying? It must be hard for a girl. You might hurt yourself."

He was going to break the ice from the beginning – she was holding only about half the amount of branches I had. It seemed he intended to present

himself as a sweet, caring guy. I wondered if Yamauchi's kindness would be conspicuous in contrast to me not helping out.

"It-its' fine... Ayanokouji-kun, he's carrying a lot. Help him out."

"Ugh! You're so nice, Sakura! Really, you're too greedy, carrying a lot of them all alone Ayanokouji. Look, I will carry half for you so lend me some."

With that, firstly he grabbed and retrieved about half of the amount. Even if Sakura refused, it seemed like a two-stage strategy to be able to appeal to her gentleness. Yamauchi, who looked satisfied, walked off in high spirits.

Such an adventure happened on the way back.

There was a girl sitting with her back on a large tree who seemed to have been left behind. She wasn't a D class student. When she realized our presence, she turned her eyes to us only once and then she completely averted her gaze like she had immediately lost interest.

Because another class left her to fend for herself, I immediately understood that the situation of the girl was not a trivial matter. On her cheek, there was a red swelling mark. I knew at first glance that was a sign of a slap, like it was struck by someone. One given with a great force too. When Yamauchi tried to rush to the girl, unconsciously I grabbed his shoulder.

"What is it?"

"Ah, No..I'm sorry. It's nothing"

Now, when I tried to say something, when I tried to say it was an unnecessary thing to do, at the last minute... I just restrained myself.

"Hey. What's wrong, are you okay?"

Yamauchi couldn't leave the injured girl alone and he wanted to take the initiative to call out to her. But.....

"Leave me alone. It's nothing."

"Oh, it's nothing?.....It doesn't seem so. Who did this to you? Should I call a teacher?"

From the state of the swelling, it was easy to see how she was accompanied

by considerable pain.

“I just had a dispute with the class. Don’t worry about it”

Laughing with self-derision, the girl said so and rejected Yamauchi’s offer. She gave off a masculine feeling, but it was clear that she looked down and unwell. I guess she was a little concerned about the story of the dispute.

“What are you going to do? I can’t just leave you here”

This place is completely different from the school grounds. It’s a jungle surrounded by another forest.

In 1 or 2 hours, the sun will begin to set. When that happens, this too could probably lead to accidents.

“You see, we’re D class students. If you don’t mind, come join us to the base camp”

Since Yamauchi asked lightly for approval, me and Sakura nodded slightly and played along with his story.

“EH? What are you talking about? Are you kidding me?”

“I mean shouldn’t we help each other when someone is in trouble? Isn’t that natural?”

She had no intention of listening to such words so she turned away and said nothing. I’m sure it would be very easy to leave her on her own but, unless in extreme circumstances, girls couldn’t be left alone in such places.

“I’m from C class. In other words, I’m your enemy. You understand that much, right?”

That’s no reason why she shouldn’t receive help.

“But...we cannot leave you behind in this kind of place, can we?”

Both me and Sakura nodded, agreeing with him. Still the girl didn’t even try to raise her heavy back from the tree. Because we’re students from the same school, it’s natural for us to help each other. But whether or not it was the right thing to do in this special trial, it’s another matter completely. Especially if you judge it in a calculating and selfish way.

"We cannot go back leaving this girl behind. We're going to be here until you move"

Yamauchi decided to continue staying in this place. Then we just had to watch and wait together. But then, the young lady, perhaps judging our presence as a temporary trick of her imagination, moved away immediately and continued on giving us the cold shoulders. She took no notice of where we stood.

"Anyway, in the forest it's gloomy and there's an unpleasant heat and humidity. Sakura, aren't you hot?"

"I....that's....uhm..not particularly....I'm okay"

Being there just waiting was really boring, but from Yamauchi's viewpoint, he had his exact wish fulfilled. Because he could spend his time with Sakura, until the girl gave in. Even then, he could also spend a meaningful time whenever he hit the girl with questions, together with Sakura. After 10 minutes or so, the girl, losing perseverance, stood up since she had no more choice.

"You guys are so stupid. You're so naïve. You aren't thinking about your own class"

"Because we can't leave behind a girl who is in trouble"

Yamauchi tried to look cool by raising his thumbs up. Sakura's impression of Yamauchi is now becoming more favourable and it's rising to good....isn't it?

The main thing is that Sakura does not care at all about Yamauchi's painful efforts. It is just like our situation, now, when we are deep in the woods and there is no meaning in trying to watch the sky. First and foremost, if he could see that Sakura is not very good at being surrounded by other people, maybe we could avoid this unpleasant situation. I let him come close to us with the best of intentions and for helping us do the task faster.

"But, excuse, me? If you are going to tell me about the place that your camp is. At least make a guide map."

"Eh?! That seems to be kind of inappropriate."

I think that Yamauchi did not understand the words of the girl and turning to my place he sought for validation. As I was thinking without saying a word, the

girl talked, without hesitation.

“What an idiot! I can not believe it, truly, I can not believe it.”

Yamauchi was taken aback and stood still. If we somehow find out where are the campsites of the other teams, how this could help our class to overcome this exam? If we study and take some measures, then, there is a possibility. Speaking of D class, the existence of the spot that the camp is based is already known. There is a part for a lot of reasons for my anxiety, but I correct my seated position and I start thinking of everything, one by one.

“It is alright, I think that there will be no problem.”

“Is that right? Then there is no problem. I am Yamauchi Haruki. Please, treat me well!”

“Well, you seem like a nice guy but..... for real you are an idiot!”

While being astounded by the self introduction, the girl without even looking towards us, gave us a short reply.

“I am... Ibuki.”

With a voice pleasant to my ears, the girl named Ibuki, as soon as she told us her name she brushed her cheek with her hand that had become quite red. Even during introductions she made sure not to meet our eyes. Maybe she hates looking at other people's eyes. Whatever it is, I am quite interested in this. It might be insignificant, but there is dirt between Ibuki's nails and hands. Just a little while ago, we found Ibuki seated down, but it seems that she was digging the ground for some reason.

“He he, nowadays fellow girls do things like fighting by slapping each other...?”

“Just let it go. Our problem is where are the other classes set up their camps.”

Even if I am saying that out loud, my aura is emitting the fact that I am actually scared. Even though I can control this, sometimes my agony is printed on my face, almost like it stroking my cheeks.

Ibuki took the bag and put it on her shoulder, like it was something troublesome, then she flashed a strange look at Yamauchi. Her eyes flickered as

she almost saw something coming.

Well, Yamauchi has to show that he is a man, at least in front of Sakura. Moreover, in order to impress me too with his technique, he offered his hand to the new girl. Truth be told, it was courteously.

“... I’m ok, wait, I’m telling you, I’m ok. Stop it.”

We might have Ibuki and her bag into custody, but there is no chance that she will entrust it to us to carry it, if we possibly believe that she will trust us, then we are in denial. The bag left her hands and as it bounced it bumped into a tree with a thud. As the atmosphere became awkward and almost dark Yamauchi apologised.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I did not have any bad intentions. I apologise.”

“I understand, it is just that I still do not trust you, guys. You do understand, right?”

That is all, it seems that there is nothing left to say, Ibuki stood still in silence, Yamauchi too, gave up and started walking. If she did not carry the bag, then she should carry some branches... Maybe she thought that we would make her carry branches in large quantities and thus hurt her hands, so she held on to the bag.

We gathered the branches and we returned to the campsite. We did not want to cause trouble as Ibuki was from a different class, so we made her sit in a place hidden from most people. Even though we left her in a place within our eyesight, I hope there will not occur any unpleasant situations. It would be a really bad luck if we were to meet Hirata. For the time being it’s me and Yamauchi, as Sakura was keeping herself busy with the preparations for the bonfire. Well, the night was beginning to fall around us and still we had not prepared to make a fire, so we felt a bit improper.

Yamauchi came with the box of matches he received from Hirata, making a heap of light branches, then, crouching down, before it.

“Let me take charge of this, I will show you an easy way to do this”

He took a match from the box and rubbed it against the rough striking surface to ignite a small amount of flammable fuel. I heard for just an instant, the

rubbing sound, but the stick did not seem that it would produce a flame easily.

“Damn it, it is really difficult.”

As Sakura was standing beside him, Yamauchi took an imposing posture, but it does not seem to work as always, especially in front of other people. Well, it seems that is not something that it will go smoothly.

Nevertheless, to repeat something for the millionth time is a challenge, but suddenly the tip of the match lit a spark.

“Oh! Alright!”

Finally, we were going to light a fire. The panic and confusion that were piling up, dropped down by a simple technique.

And... It only produced smoke and in spite of waiting for a long time to spread its flames and see the fire, well there was no sign of it.

“Eh?!....”

“Should we do it more thoroughly, so that it will set fire on the branches? They way we are doing it now is not going to bring any result.”

“Alright, this time I will try to do it more carefully. Ah!... Damn it! I failed again. Did they give us defective goods or something?”

It is really difficult to spark a fire using only one match stick, for real, we will not be able to have a bonfire any time soon. Also, Yamauchi gradually seemed to lose his temper, so naturally he grazed the tip of the match with vigor and the thin tip of the stick peeled off too quickly. Like this, 1 match, 2 matches and so on, ended up unused and the sticks were piling up.

“If we fail to start a fire with what remaining matches in the box, then we will be in trouble.”

On Yamauchi’s feet there was one third of the matches that went to waste, so in order to cool him down I spoke to him.

“It’s ok, it’s ok. It’s enough, because we only have just a few”.

I grabbed the match box from him. It did feel light, but there were in no less than 20 sticks. However... If we wanted to keep on using them for a week, then

there was a possibility that they were not going to last long.

“I got it! This time, for sure!”

Thankfully, just like as I thought, he put the stick carefully closer to the branches. Surely in order to start a fire, it is necessary to possess a level of skill, but in order to maintain it, it needs persistence. We cannot expect to have a fire based only on our wishes. Again, although the wood branches emitted smoke, still it did not turn into a spreading fire.

“But why? I did not make any mistakes this time, right?! I’m going to ask our teacher for advice.”

Failing to look cool in front of Sakura, Yamauchi, felt more flustered than usual, now goes to search for Mrs. Chabashira.

He should think more clearly about the obvious matter. I crouched down trying to rearrange the branches with my hands.

“Why we cannot light a fire?”

This moment, another figure crouched down beside me looking with wonder the burned traces of our efforts.

“I thought that it would be easy, since we used wood, but compared to my imagination, starting a fire in real life is far harder.”

I could not comprehend the meaning of Sakura’s words, so I just nodded in agreement, pretending that I heard of what she said.

“The bonfires that we see in movies or in dramas are huge with lots of piles of branches, so we take this as reality. We stayed close to this image and we went to gather branches, however, why we couldn’t start a fire with our great skills?

We folded the thin branches into one pile.

“It feels like this time we should attach the stick from the side of the thin branches, since there are many branches that are damp, too.”

The amateur wondered if it was a reckless act, setting fire to wet branches. Well it seemed like the fire didn’t spread widely even though Yamauchi used dozens of matches.

"It's a little troublesome, but we need to go again in the forest to pick up thin and dry branches and highly inflammable leaves..."

"Huh, what are you guys doing in such a place!"

While we went through a trial and error process, Ike, who we'd thought had gone swimming, came back.

"Now, we're a bit in the middle of a preliminary drill of the bonfire. We're struggling and we've been unlucky until now."

"Bonfire, you say? You won't ever set a fire going with those thick branches. Aren't thin branches necessary, at the beginning? The branches that you bring mustn't be thick. There are also wet branches here. It's a complete NO for those too. You're all so lame!"

"Ah, but actually Ayanokouji-kun..."

I decided to cut off Sakura's words. She was following me around.

"Is that so? If you don't mind, can you tell me what should I do?"

"Jeez, I have no choice. I'll do an easy lecture. Just wait a bit, I'll pick them up in a more suitable area"

With that, Ike put down the bag containing his swimsuit, went in the proximity of the forest and came back soon after. It seemed like he picked up branches of several levels, from thin branches to branches of medium thickness. Besides, he also returned bringing with him a bundle of dead leaves.

"I brought some suitable branches. I think we'll manage somehow."

As he said so, he picked up the box where Yamauchi put the matches and quickly set fire on the dead leaves, then the leaves gradually flared and he moved the twigs around. After that, while we watched the regulation of the fire, he cautiously added the branches according to their thickness. In a blink of an eye, the small fire's appearance changed to one of a familiar bonfire.

"That should do it."

"That's amazing. I'm genuinely impressed. As expected, a person who already experienced camping life sure is different."

"It's the basis within the basis. The way to start a fire. Anyone can remember it even if they see it only once."

But he's a very important person now since there are almost no students who have the same experience in D class.

"Oh, crap. Guys, teacher didn't teach me anything — Wow. Why is a bonfire set?"

Yamauchi, who now came back, was surprised to see the splendidly completed bonfire. He was complaining for a little while, grumbling and completely forgetting to show his cool side.

I decided to leave the matter of the bonfire to Ike and Yamauchi, so I left the place.

"Hey, Heyy Ayanokouji-kun. I noticed what you were about to say something before and is it okay to tell them? You don't have to say anything though, if you don't want to."

"Even if you're right there's no solid evidence of my experience, so it bare no meaning to tell them now. Instead, when my experience can be useful to Ike, I'll confirm it myself later for the sake of the class."

That's some cheesy lines there but I simply spoke my mind.

Sakura was looking at me like she was impressed or moved. Somehow, I was feeling embarrassed.

"Sorry. I'm a bit tired so I'll go get some rest. Thank you Sakura."

As I run away, I kept my distance from the base camp.

Miss Chabashira, who was preparing a tent for personal use in the vicinity, fixed her eyes in my direction. But in the end she decided to ignore me by pretending of not noticing me there.

When the wristwatch turned 5 o'clock Kushida and her group returned. Hirata, too, was mobilised with Kushida's group. As this was somehow the return of the leader, the students were starting to gather close around. It seems that they were searching for food supplies and they looked like they were carrying food. Looking from a distance, it seemed to me that they were carrying

some kind of small red fruits, something like strawberries, or even small tomatoes and also there were things that had the shape of grapes and kiwis.

“Can we really.... eat all these?, they do look like some kind of fruits, but still..”

Since there is no self-confidence the students looked at each other waiting for someone to do or at least say something. But who has got the courage to eat a fruit that has never been seen by them before?

“Nevertheless, my throat is thirsty.... and my stomach is empty”

“Me too, my throat feels a bit dry”

Evening may come and still the students will have the same conversation without actually doing something. I feel like after all, I am all alone in this.

But, as the time for dinner came closer the problem of adequate food and water became distinct.

“Hey! Isn’t this bog bilberry?” Did you find a Chinese bell-flower, too?” “That’s cool!”

Catching up the uproar, Ike, who was sitting close to the bonfire, came closer. Grasping one of the fruits, he spoke.

“Kanji, do you understand what is this?”

“Ah, this is the fruit of a bog bilberry. I ate this when I went for camping at Otoyama. In appearance as well in taste it looks like a blueberry. This one is Akebia Canada (chocolate vine). It is tasty and sweet. Well, it certainly brings back memories”

Oddly, he was not trying to look elsewhere. Having found these berries that brought back memories from the past, he was smiling like a kid, but everyone else just stood there, watching at Ike and no one said a word of admiration or encouragement.

Shinohara may have decided to attack Ike with her question, however, she got an upfront reply.

“Huh?... Somehow, I feel that they have a much better taste than I remember”

As the cause of the disturbance is now obscure, the class is mostly gathered around this matter. Being able to get food, even in such small amounts is still a factor that can determine our win.

“At least you could do one thing. Thank you for the bonfire, Ayanokouji”

“It wasn’t me, thank Ike, instead”

The fire kept burning steadily, but the smoke was making strange shapes. It was almost like reminding the others who were responsible for this duty. But, as soon as I said Ike’s name, he came to us.

“If we get lost in the woods, just by looking at the smoke, we can locate the place of the camp and come back, right?”

“That is the reason we came back so quickly, it is thanks to you, Kanji!”

They can’t understand that this way it is inevitable that our camp may be found easily by the other classes, too?

It is not just Kushida, the other students too nodded in agreement to Ike’s words of admiration. The unexpected attention and the look of honor I thought it would turn him into a Tengu or something, but Ike was not looking at Kushida, he was facing Shinohara.

“Hey... Shinohara. I was thinking about it all day, my behavior, I mean. On an isolated island, when there is no toilet, it must be hard for the students. In order to protect the points that we need I exaggerated. So, I apologise”

“Huh? Why are you apologising, so suddenly?”

“It’s because of my memories. I remembered the first time I went camping. That time it was hard, thinking what to do about a toilet among other things, of course with bugs crawling around and getting dirty. That is why I hated going to the toilet. So, when I came back, I complained to my parents. I reminded myself, how difficult it was, not to mention that this is way more difficult for the girls...”

Ike explained his situation while keeping his cool composure. Being able to do this, he was truly an outstanding guy. He was able to stand out as an excellent individual, and excel himself to a great deal compared to me. Of course the fact

that he had to share this story it took a lot of courage. However, this courage for apologising seems to be infectious. Before long Shinohara began explaining her situation.

“Me too... I apologise for earlier. For denying to drink the water from the river, saying that it is not good enough. I overstep the boundaries think I got too emotional. I believe we all have to try and do things so we can preserve our points and win.”

Even though both of them could not see each other straight in the eyes, it seemed like they reconciled.

Whatever happens unexpectedly, well it happens. It seems that D class may actually manage to save points. This premonition, this omen might have been felt by the other students, too. That's why Hirata would not leave this chance pass him by. He raised his hands getting everyone's attention.

“Everyone, no matter what, we all have one goal. It is our first time that we face such a special exam, but we understand why we might have these perplexed feelings, also, each person has a different system of values so it is natural to create misunderstandings. However, without panic, without disturbances, until the end, I want to put trust in each other and move forward.”

He said this with a clear tone in his voice. He composed himself to catch up and he continued talking with comprehension.

“After all, even if we are left with only one point, it is still good, alright? That's because everyone has their own sense of reality. But, in order to make an estimation we have to derive the appropriate numbers. This will only happen at the end of the exam. We might be left with 120 points or less. This is the feeling for which D class should be fighting for”

“So, are you planning to use 180 points? That is a naive perception of our situation”

If we end up using more than a half... Having made already the calculation, Yukimura, shoot a sharp look, not wanting to let this go.

Hirata could sense what was happening around him, so he left the manual on

the ground and he began to explain how he reached that conclusion.

“Firstly, I want you to listen to me until I conclude what I have to say. We have to cover the points for our meals, it is our number 1 expenses and I thought that our sources are scarce. Our need for nutritious food and mineral water should become a set.”

Food and drinking water for class credit we have for 1 meal, 6 points each. If we do it as a set we have 1 meal for 10 points. If we have 2 meals per day, that's 20 points. If we start from today until the day we finish the exam, the total amount is 12 meals. 120 points in total. If we omit the final day and try to tolerate our hunger, then we might finish with 110 points. Our temporary toilet cost us 20 points, the use of the 2 tents of the boys, adds another 20 points. All that in total is 150 points. We are left with 30 points and we have, almost a week to live here, that totals 180 points. Hirata's plan had a basis of truth and left everyone else at a loss for words.

“When I hear that there are only 120 points left, I get the feeling that we are going to spend them, quickly, too. However, it is only transient and I want to remind you that you are too conscious of the 300 points. For this reason we have to see the result of the midterm test or the end of the term test, in order to find out more easily. For the written exams before our summer vacation, we received a change to our points, but even if it wasn't for A class' superiority, we could not reach these 100 points. When I see the situation, I understand that 120 points is a small amount, available. However, adding one thing to another, when we reach the end of the examination, the ability of holding exclusive possessions, may give us bonus points. So, in reality after all, there are plenty of points left”

“Well, that was me thinking about the lower limit of our points, if, we can find the food and water for just one day we can save 20 points, then we may make it through. If we are not troubled with potable water for one week, then we can win more than 50 points and that might help us change the game”

With the sound of the streaming river close by, Hirata keeps talking and then the importance of the river hit us like a blow.

“So.. this is how it goes, if we can try and show self-control, just a little, we

might be able to change our standing..."

Even while talking about similar matter, his tone and protocol gave a different impression. Hirata's progression of words was almost perfect. After letting them know the lower limits, he finally told about the possibility of saving nearly 200 points. By doing so, he reasonably succeeded in setting high goals on his classmates. If we do our best, not only we can save a lot of points, but we'll be at ease thinking that the points will increase steadily with some effort.

"That's okay, isn't it Hirata? We can earn at least 120 points. If we do it, we can earn points by only adding our performance, right? Let's try it!" Ike, who was thought to be the most confronting, agreed in a burst and raised his voice. Sudou and Yamauchi also agreed as if there's no other option. Yukimura still seemed a little reluctant, but gave up after seeing his fellow Ike siding with Hirata.

"Aah, that's right, Hirata, I have something to check—" Since Yamauchi forgot to report about Ibuki, I had no other choice but to call it out myself. However, class continued the discussion with a lot of energy without a chance of cutting in.

"It's fate of popular person I guess... Should I do it later?"

I approached Ibuki, who was watching the situation from a distance, and gently called out:

"Sorry, could you wait a bit more, I'm trying to consult about your situation."

"Don't force yourself particularly. I don't want to get in the way." As if she has feelings of self-hatred, Ibuki grasped the grass tightly and pulled it out strongly.

"After all, I'll soon be expelled from here, right?"

"I don't know. Hirata is exceptionally softhearted." I couldn't imagine him kicking her out when he finds out about Ibuki's circumstances.

"I didn't introduce myself before. I'm Ayanokouji."

"Should I do it one more time as well?"

"No, that's fine. You're Ibuki from C class. I remember well."

We faced each other after I'd finished introducing again, but Ibuki didn't make

an eye contact after all.

“For reference, those thinking that it’s okay to drink river water please raise your hands.” Overlooking at Ibuki and D class, Ike tried to change the topic of discussion. This time, it wasn’t in an enforcement but to ask for opinions. Of course, he took the initiative and raised his hand. Closely half of the boys raised their hands in agreement. Shinohara seemed to be a little puzzled, but Ike gently told her to loosen it up.

“I-I want to agree... But I’m a bit scared.”

“I think what Sudou said earlier about boiling isn’t bad. If you’re scared of drinking it directly, why don’t you try drinking it boiled first?”

A few students agreed with this. With a different timing, a once refused matter was accepted smoothly. Shinohara also raised her hand, albeit angrily.

“I don’t know if we can drink it, but... Let’s try.”

“I also agree. If the first person can drink it, then it’s okay for sure.” With other students easily agreeing, Kushida raised her hand following Shinohara. Was the influence of collective psychology on work? Everybody raising their hands except for Horikita and me was an unexpected development. Since the focus came to us, we who didn’t bother raising hands before lightly raised ours as well. However, it was difficult for everyone to suddenly drink the water. Therefore, we decided to purchase the water not only to secure it, but with the proposal of effectively using pet bottles.

“I have a request for you, Ike-kun. I want you to help me with your abilities from now. It looks like you’re the only one in the class with proper camping experience... Could you help me?”

“Well, well, if you’re saying it by all means I might cooperate.”

“Thank you!”

As if Ike’s curt response was a pleasant one, Hirata jumped with joy. Neither Shinohara, who seemed to complain the most, didn’t cut in. He started seeking for opinions on food immediately.

“It’s getting dark soon so we can only order for the time being. But please, let

me think for a while from tomorrow. It seems there's various food close to us so I will check that out tomorrow."

"What do you mean close to us? Is it a different place from where Kushida and others found fruits?"

"Uh-huh, there's this river. It's a good place to catch and eat fish. It seemed there's quite of freshwater fish by checking it only at a glimpse. I think we'll be able to suppress point expenditure to some point. It would be absolutely delicious to catch a fish and eat it grilled on bonfire."

"Even if it tastes good, how are you planning to catch a fish?"

"Well, I'll dive like this? I haven't done it before." Ike made a swimming gesture, but it's probably not easy to catch a fish by doing skin dive.

"Even if it seems unreasonable to catch it with bare hands, capturing a fish is perfectly realistic."

Said Hirata, pointing at an entry mentioned in the manual. There was a character of fishing rod, and it looked like several kinds are being lent separately as well.

"1 point for fishing rods using baits, 2 points for those with lures."

That is to say, it didn't seem surprisingly hard to recover a cost.

Depending on the situation, it could become the most spectacular victory to secure an amount of food for 1 to 2 days with only one point. Even in a situation where we wouldn't be able to catch any, it's hardly a serious blow due to minimal expenditure.

Without hearing any objections, Ike said happily: "It's a deal, then. Let's get a fishing rod and lure them in. Of course, with the cheaper one."

With this, we decided our goals to be supplying food from forest and ensuring fishes starting from tomorrow. If we succeed in catching fishes or obtaining vegetables, we would decide via discussion on purchasing a set of cooking utensils with additional 5 points.

Then we decided on paying 20 points for installing one shower room via discussion as well. Strong objections were expected, but with a high possibility

of ruining our health with cold water, granted that the boys will only use it in the middle of the night and all the girls give a positive response of wanting to drink river water, we convinced the opposition faction into approval.

"By the way... That girl, Ibuki from C class, right? I saw her before." A female student named Satou was suspiciously watching Ibuki who was quietly sitting at a distance. She seemed to notice her before so there was no need for me to break the ice.

"Err, it looks like there were troubles in class..." Yamauchi explained a little hurriedly why she might have been isolated from classmates.

"I see, that's a proper judgement. We can't leave her."

"But Hirata-kun... She could be a spy? There are rules applying to leaders..."

"Ah, is that so? ... There is that kind of possibility..."

Yamauchi was confused with him having noticed it now. He wanted him to notice that in the first place, if possible.

"I'll check that from now. Is that okay, Yamauchi-kun and Ayanokouji-kun?"

Hirata called out Ibuki and two other acquaintances and headed towards the place where Ibuki was. Did Hirata exclude Sakura due to his ikemen-like thoughtfulness? Sakura also seemed to be relieved for not being noticed.

"Is it a good time, Ibuki-san? I want to ask you some details."

"I'm probably a nuisance. You've taken good care of me." As if she made a decision on her own, she got up quickly trying to leave.

"Wait a minute. I wanted to ask in case something happens... I want to help."

He called her to halt, emphasizing the end of the sentence. Did Hirata also sensed it wasn't a trivial thing looking at her swollen face?

"Things won't change if I wait. I don't want to waste any more time here."

"This is a trial, of course there will be students that doubt you. However, I don't want to oust you if you're hurt and aren't able to go back to your class. Therefore, I was thinking of bringing Yamauchi-kun here as well. I want you to tell me your conditions properly."

“This isn’t something that will work out by talking. Besides, I’ve heard your discussions before. It will become a problem if your strategies so far will be leaked.”

Turning away, Ibuki started walking. Hirata cut in a bit forcibly.

“If you’re really a spy, you wouldn’t be talking about being expelled. Right?”

“It’s enough already. I’m only looking for a place where I can sleep.”

As expected, she won’t return to C class. With the sun sinking, the night will come soon.

“It’s crazy for a girl to sleep outdoor alone in this woods.”

“Even if it’s crazy, it’s the only thing to do. You don’t gain anything even if you help me.”

“This isn’t about gaining or losing. We can’t just leave a person in trouble. We all think so.”

Her refreshing face had suddenly sunk. She showed it to us without regrets. When said in this manner, that’s no way to go against a person who has been taken captive. Ibuki followed Hirata’s resolution, she spoke with a few words and hesitantly like she finally knew what had happened.

“I had a dispute with a boy of the class. That’s why I was slapped and kicked out by that ass. That’s it”

“That’s horrible. Raising a hand on a woman”

I also didn’t foresee this development. I thought, without a doubt, she was hit in a fight among girls.

“I don’t plan to give a detailed account for it. I don’t even think you will give refuge to me, a runaway. See ya”

“Wait. I understand that you’re really in trouble, and now I understood the situation. Give us a little time. Then you will talk to the other students about your circumstances and how you’ve been left behind. Ayanokouji-kun, can you stay and watch Ibuki-san? From now on, we will go telling everyone of your situation”

That being said, they returned to their groups and left me there. Did he leave me here because he trusted me or because I took Yamauchi's place as the reliable person? Just wondering.

"That fellow, he's really too softhearted, isn't he?"

"To a greater and less extent, most people are like this. There aren't people who are like that too, in your class?"

"Not at all. Those kind of people are almost nonexistent in C class."

That being said, Ibuki sat once more on the ground, hugging her knees to her chest, without looking up. And as a result of the discussion and also thanks to Hirata's persuasion and social influence, it's been decided that Ibuki will be looked after in D class. Some students strongly expressed opposition to it but on the occasion of the roll call, C class will give up points.

It seemed that ultimately they accepted it and thought of it as an opportunity. Hirata didn't seem to have the same mind but the other students thought otherwise. Precisely because there could be a gain, a profit from it, it's better to recognize the opportunity and take it.

However, the occupancy rights issue of this place is very delicate. Everything has been precisely explained to Ibuki and they made her promise not to inadvertently approach the device. It's a natural they will do so because, if someone let slip that the leader is Horikita, she will suffer great damage.

Then we decided to order and purchase from Miss Chabashira two sets of food, water and men's tent needed for tonight. With the cooperation of Hirata and Ike, the tent was assembled smoothly. Just before the sun sets down, everything was prepared and the students started to eat as much as they liked.

"Oh, Ibuki-san, here eat this"

Kushida walked up to Ibuki who had been at a distance where she was left alone. Then she offered her one nutritious meal and a bottle of water.

"What is this? Why me?"

"Aren't you hungry?"

"But certainly isn't food provided and divided per class, is it? There shouldn't

be any spare left”

“Yes, but it’s okay. We decided to share everything with the group”

From a little far away, four people of Kushida’s group waved their hands in Ibuki’s direction with smiling faces. In other words, 4 people shared 3 portions of food and water, and the extra portion went to Ibuki.

“I’m not an idiot. Everyone, you’re too softhearted”

“Don’t hesitate to eat. Also, let’s talk later. I’ll be waiting in the tent”

Kushida told her so and went back to her group. It seems easy to help a kid from another class until we have to reduce our own portions of food. It then becomes difficult. But Kushida, who wishes for everyone’s happiness, would absolutely do an act of charity.

“Well, seen in this light, it’s all remarkable. Even the girls are”

Yamauchi, who was eating, pointed at each group.

“The empress team led by Karuizawa. Kushida’s team with her own close friends. Shinohara’s arrogant team. And then, Horikita and Sakura who are by themselves”

All the boys were eating huddled relatively together but the girls were taking distance from each team. Obviously there seemed to be a wall or a gap there, just like they were groups of other classes. If there were any exceptions, then Kushida team would be considered neutral or more precisely it was far from having a lot of influence as a whole?

“Sakura is so pitiful. I should just eat with her, right?”

“Just stop that. You will probably scare her”

“Damn, I want to get closer but the fact that she’s too shy is a problem”

Other than Sakura’s flaw, she probably feels that it’s hard to come in touch with a pushy type like Yamauchi. Despite the warnings, Yamauchi seemed worried and he was too impatient to go to her.

“What is it, Haruki!! You’re sly, watching a beautiful woman all by yourself. Let me join you!”

Ike, who was looking at Yamauchi glancing around with a repeated strange movement, misunderstood and approached him.

"Honestly, anytime I see them, Sakura's breasts are not that bad. They're not the size of a 1st year student. Her shirt is bulging out. They're too erotic. That's even more attractive than Kikyou-chan"

Ike was looking at Sakura's breasts devouringly and with sheer concentration. Yamauchi then blocked Ike's field of vision.

"Hey, what the fuck"

"Don't look at Sakura as you please and with those pervert eyes. You have your eyes set on Kushida, right?"

"Yeah yeah, you're absolutely right. But it's okay. An idol is for everyone right? Haruki, you, ohhh, maybe you...towards Sakura...."

"Well, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. Look, let's eat quickly!"

Apparently as for Yamauchi, it seems that he wants to keep secret the fact that he switched his aim to Sakura. In this camp, there's no time left anyway in the night to do something. It's the flow of the nature that rouses this sort of love talks. I noticed that there was Hirata nearby handing out food.

"Huh? By the way, where's Kouenji-kun?

I thought that everyone was gathering here, but Kouenji is missing.

"As for Kouenji, he complained about being in a poor physical condition and returned to the ship. Of course, since he became sick, 30 points have already been deducted to you all. It can't be helped. This is the rule. Kouenji is now retired and he has the obligation of being on the ship for 1 week, receiving medical treatment and waiting for further orders"

"Eeeeeeeeeehhhhhhhhhh????"

Screams of shock rose all at once.

"Don't kid around. Kouenji, that sucker!! What is he thinking?"

The usually silent Yukimura yelled and began kicking the ground. I thought he was a free man in all respects, but surely he selfishly retired. He didn't feel the

need to rise to class A. To ease up, even if the class lost 30 points, I don't care at all.

"Damn!! We've lost 130 points. Fuck it!"

Both boys and girl seemed raging mad at Kouenji's actions but if the person himself is not here they can't hit him. Kouenji's booming laughter continued to reverberate in everyone's head.

Chapter 2: The competitors make their move

Lately, I wake up in the morning always way earlier than I thought I would. Tonight, the heat and the humidity made me turn over in my sleep countless times. So, before I even realised it, I was awake already. I felt my back warm and I remembered that in my tent we kept the lamp alight all night. Moreover, I was feeling already sweaty. The subject of how to use the tent, was still a complicated matter, so we kept it unchanged. The night air that was coming in the tent was a blessing, but as soon as the dawn breaks then the temperature is slowly rising. Without wanting to wake up anyone else, I sneaked out of the tent, as quietly as possible. Outside it was like being enclosed by mountains, because a lot of packages were stuffed close to our tent. My classmates, boys and girls alike prefer to keep their things, supplies and bags out of their tents. Because we wanted to do the best out of the use of the tent, we did not bring any of the packages inside.

First, I checked that no one was close around and then, I started looking for a certain thing of a certain color. Yesterday, we found a girl from another class, Ibuki and it is her bag that I am looking for. Because her bag has a different color from those we use in my class, it will be easy to find it.

As soon as I see it, I stretch my hands to take it. While I am opening the zipper slowly, I am thinking that if I get caught by someone this very moment, then I am sure I will be stuck with the stigma of being a pervert. Inside there is a towel, a change of clothes, underwear. Just the fundamentals that everyone would carry in their bags. But, wait, what is this?.....

"A digital camera?!..."

So, I was right... I knew I heard a dull sound yesterday when Yamauchi tried to help get the bag and it fell close to a nearby tree. This is not an item fitting to have on a deserted island . At the bottom of the camera there is the sticker seal that proves it has been lent. Why Ibuki has such a thing? I have to think of the reasons why. If I were in Ibuki's shoes... What would I use this for? As soon as I

bring the image in my head, a lot of possibilities are rising into the surface. Well, now that I retrieved a digital camera the first thing that I have to do is to find a source of electricity and try to check what kind of images it has saved in its memory card. There are no traces that proves it has been used, no data that have been uploaded. After I found out what I was looking for, I returned the bag to its place and returned to my tent.

“Good morning, Ayanokouji, where are you going, to the toilet?”

Hirata was not sleeping anymore, instead he was being awake and turning his head towards me, he was speaking to me, already. How come? I was so taken aback that I feel that he even noticed my hands getting wet from sweating.

“Oh! Did I wake you up, maybe?”

“No, not really. It is not like it’s easy to sleep well in this environment. It’s just... my lower back hurts. Well, when we do not have anything to use as a proper mattress below us to sleep, then it is only natural.”

Certainly, here we have no mattresses and no pillows, plus, we are really crowded in the tents, so sleeping in these conditions is not comfortable, however, with the exception of us, now, I could hear nothing other than the sound of our classmates sleeping. I bet they are tired of moving around doing various tasks, all day long.

“The points that we used yesterday and also the fact that Kouenji retired, combined, cost us around 100 points. I talked to everyone about the worst possible scenario, to be left with only 120 points. However, in reality we cannot know exactly how many points we are going to have in the end... As I was thinking about all these, I woke up”

Hirata took out the manual as if wanting to confirm the situation. Kouenji’s retirement, no doubt, was a hard blow.

“It will be all right. We came to this conclusion for the benefit of our class”

It is not that simple though and I do not want to bear the burden on my shoulders all alone. From my side of things I have to look into the manual. We have to adjust the place that we keep the manual so that it is not hard to look into. But, such a detailed attentiveness is welcome.

"I am only doing this because, I like it. In addition, I will do what I can for the comfort of our class. That is my only satisfaction, I get from this, but, I have to admit this is unexpectedly difficult. How many points remain in this special examination from now on will affect deeply our school life. In other words, I think it is wrong to force a wrong feeling"

So the class does well and we can live in comfort eh? Well, if there is a chance to succeed then this conversation is nothing more than a dream. To be honest, this is nearly impossible. Because the point system of this school is simply legendary.

"Do we aim to be like the students of A class? Or do we try to catch up to them by being ourselves as the students of D class? So, what should we do?"

Hearing myself asking this question, I understood that it had no meaning, I ended up making an ill-tempered question. Hirata is a lump of good mannered intentions. He thought that I just wanted to hear his opinion on the matter, so he spoke.

"It's a difficult question. To aim on catching up to the classes above us, even if we work all together with all our might... I'm sorry. I can not give you a proper answer, right away."

How many times does he have to think of that matter? Hirata offered a reply like an apology while smiling back at me faintly.

"Ayanokouji, do you aim to reach A class? Or are you a person that thinks school life should be just for fun?

"How should I say it? It is a priority in my school life. But ascending to A class is not something to think as something realistic."

"I see. Me, too, I feel that it is not that simple. For example, even if all of us together in unison, to aim at A class, the failure of our first month in school that we carried on our shoulders is big"

Even though Hirata was not a big mouth, he included a lot of other students in this plan. If we are talking about the top rank, we cannot omit class A. Even with great effort it is not easy to shorten the difference. We have to fill up a difference close to a 1000 points. For real this is an enormous thing to do. We

have to keep in mind that the utility factor of this examination, is to try and win points by our everyday life here. So, if we look about the situation of class D this means that we have to gain about 100 to 150 points. However, even if we want to surpass class C, which is the immediate class above us in ranking, it is a dream that still remains just a dream, at the moment.

"I think that we do not have to be impatient. First of all, now, D class has to pass this test as a whole. In order to do this, we have to look at our next goal with ease."

Hirata is free to choose the way that we will do this. Moreover, the large part of our classmates will approve his decision, for sure. It is a necessary need for all of us to understand that we have to give a great effort into earning our daily necessities, here, so that we earn the points for our class. It is not a bad idea to close our eyes and ignore the huge difference in points between us and the other classes, at least for now.

As I was getting into Hirata's naïve resolution, he got up quietly, without waking up anyone, went out of the tent and headed towards the toilet. Hirata's absence made the tent quieter, so I threw myself into the open space and stretched my body. Somehow we should check out the situation of A class, if not, then we should find out the spots of C class and B class.

We have an advantage because we control the river, however, it is hard to say that it gives us a level of superiority. Once again, I check and make sure that all the members in our tents are sleeping. Looking into the manual book I found around 5 blank pages. One of them is beautifully cut. I borrowed his ballpoint pen. After simply replicating a map of an island, I folded it into a small piece and put it in the pocket. Shortly thereafter Hirata, who came back from the toilet, peeked inside from the entrance.

"Would you like to go have a face wash with me?"

I accepted. The temperature inside the tent was steadily rising with the sunrise.

We decided to go to a nearby river so we took out the towels from our luggage which were wrapped in vinyl. Hirata took the opportunity to put the manual in his bag so it took us some time. Plastic accessories that were

attached to Hirata's bag made a rubbing sound.

"Are those gifts from Karuizawa, perhaps?"

"You've figured it out well. How did you know?"

It was easy to guess looking at the accessory that had a heart mark.

When we headed for the river, we unexpectedly noticed someone was there.

"What are you doing here?"

Kanzaki from B class was watching this way examining D class' process. With him were unknown boys, probably B class students, who were watching somewhat further away. He was slightly surprised, as if he hadn't suspect us coming so early from our tent, but soon regained his calmness.

"One day has passed so I was wondering what had happened. I came to check your situation. You've seized a good place."

He was honestly interested looking at the base camp from a riverside. It didn't seem he had an especially ulterior motive.

"Indeed, you are... B class Kanzaki, right?"

Hirata seemed to recognize Kanzaki since he remembered his name.

"Have I surprised you? Sorry, it wasn't in ill intention."

Apologizing, Kanzaki turned his back on us and started walking.

"Kanzaki, where does B class have their base camp?"

I didn't know if he was going to tell us, but I tried asking. Kanzaki then turned back and replied without reluctance.

"There are large crooked trees on the way back to the beach when going along the road from here. There is a camping ground where B class stays when heading into the forest southwest from there. You won't get lost when you enter into large trees. Tell her I won't mind if she comes in need."

He left saying this. Hirata exchanged curious look with me.

"They were friends. But what does he mean by telling her?"

"Hmm, what could that mean..."

Kanzaki, Ichinose and Horikita were once cooperating due to the previous false accusation. Perhaps he thinks they're still in good terms.

"Did you come spying D class to see how we used our points?"

There was no doubt that was one of the purposes after seeing a discomfort look on his face. He could check with certainty regarding our points consumption by only seeing the number of toilets, showers and tents. However, that isn't only the only thing they wanted to know. They probably wanted to know who's the leader of the class. The right of owning a spot expires every 8 hours, which means it was possible they calculated backwards and aimed for time update. But of course, we predicted that too. For that reason, by purposely postponing the second update yesterday the ownership right was adjusted to expire after 8 o'clock. By doing this after the roll-call, it is possible to update the occupancy rights by using crowds as a camouflage.

Hirata washed his face in the river as if he absolutely didn't mind being spied. If anything, it seemed that he was more uneasy. He wiped in the towel and muttered:

"Isn't our strategy wrong... Even if we don't win over other classes, I'd like to team up and complete the trial at least. That's why I don't want my leader identity to be noticed."

His hair wet from water was shining. A breathtakingly handsome man doesn't have to care about anything.

"Don't worry so much. You should be more carefree."

"Thank you. Saying this makes me honestly happy."

After washing my face, I scooped river water with my hand and put it into my mouth. Even in extremely hot forest, the river water was cold and tasty. Since groundwater flows into the river as spring water, the river water warms up and cools down hardly and since it flows from the upstream its temperature hardly rises. It was quite of luck that we seized this place as a base.

"First of all, I think that we need to adjust our bed properly. Since the ground is hard here, it's going to be a tough week without a substitute for cushion like a mat. Get into action by gathering opinions when everyone wakes up. We have

to cooperate and do our best."

Part 1

After the end of the morning roll call, we were free to move as we pleased. Of course Hirata gave instructions to reliable classmates, also starting a strategy on how to save points. On the other hand students who didn't really feel like helping out or people like me and Horikita who preferred to be independent began their own activities.

"What the fuck are you, guys!"

Suddenly, Ike's angry voice resonated through the camp's ground. I looked in the direction of the voice in order to peep through the situation. And then two male students stood grinning like Cheshire cats.

Ibuki, who showed a bitter expression only for a moment, stepped into the shade of the tent like she was trying to hide herself.

"Komiya and Kondou?"

Like Ibuki who coughed abruptly, I also found those two people familiar. They were two students of C class.

"Well well, it seems that D class is living a rather frugal life. As expected, this is a class of defectives"

While filling their mouths with potato chips snack, they bought PET bottles to fight the heat. And it was not just water there, it looked like soda.

"It seems that you have a very comfortable life instead. You C class fellows"

"Do you know Ryuuuen?"

"He's a C class student. I heard various rumors about him. Quite a reckless fellow, it seems"

"Not quite so. Everything that guy does ends up being messy"

Ibuki then spoke, becoming irritated, as if she was talking about her own enemy.

"Those two are that Ryuuen's gang mates. You can say they're his underlings"

If I think about it, those two fought a lot with Sudo in the past as well and rather than accidentally appearing in this place, it's more probable that Ryuuen is moving more in the shadows and sent them here.

"What did you have for breakfast? Grass? Or insects? Here, you can eat snacks too"

With that, he took out one potato chip and threw it near Ike's foot who, meanwhile, crawled to it. The whole D class couldn't help but be irritated, while watching that instigating behavior. Exactly because they still continued to cut the supplies of food.

"We have a message from Ryuuen-san. If you want to fully enjoy summer vacation, you should come to the beach right now. Don't be reserved. You better come. If you're sick of living like fools, let's spend a dream time together"

I thought they would go back immediately after but they stayed here. They continued to eat snacks before everyone as a form of harassment.

It seemed that Ike was snarling at them repeatedly but there was nothing to worry about. On the contrary sometimes a repeated provocative behavior seemed to fuel even more antipathy. Such provocation from C class continued for 10 minutes, but as Hirata decided it was the moment to leave and gather again, we went back to the direction of the place we considered our own campsite.

"It doesn't seem like they came to search for me"

"Ah, they simply had a harassing purpose"

It was a bizarre behaviour but we were able to obtain the information that C class, by using points, had their hands on luxury goods such as sweets and juice.

In this special trial where we should save up, even if it's only one point, what the hell is that suppose to mean?

"A while ago, those two told us to share with them a dream time, do you happen to know what were they talking about?"

".....maybe, I wonder if it's not moving towards the worst case scenario"

Ibuki didn't say anything more than that, and just like yesterday, she headed to the side of a tree that was a little far away.

The worst case scenario...

Just in case, it seems better to put it in Horikita's ears.

"Horikita, are you here?"

After breakfast, Horikita returned immediately in the tent and didn't show up anymore. I called out to her in front of the girls' tent. Although there was no reply for a while, a sound of the tent swaying slightly and of cloth rubbing was heard. When that sound stopped, Horikita came out slowly from inside.

"Did you hear the voices a while ago?"

"Yeah, I heard it was a cheap provocation on C class's part"

"I'm a little worried and I'm thinking of going to supervise the situation, do you want to go together?"

"It's something rare...seeing you act by yourself, taking the initiative. Are you ok? Is your physical condition good?"

These are actually words I want to return back to her.

"After all, I'm free for a week. I have nothing special to do today too and this is a way to kill time"

"I don't want to move too much. Now that I'm the leader, there is also the possibility of an accident, if I stand out too much and too poorly"

"It's a risk you have to take since you've been designated as a suitable leader"

Even if you're not sure on who is the leader, if you report a student as a leader, there's always a possibility of being right. The more you stand out, the more you will be on the list of suspicious people to keep an eye on.

"I understand your feelings but, even if you remain secluded, it won't change the situation. You've been keen to look for Ryuuuen and you've been observing Ichinose. There's also the fact that you're the sister of the students' council president and your colleagues are also aware of it. In other words, no matter what you do, you will become one of the targets"

Either way, whether you guess right or you miss the target you still get 50 points just this once, and since there's no definite evidence, gambling on this is hard. The moment we designated a leader, certain conditions became necessary.

"You're right. No matter what I think about it, I guess you can't tell which one is the right leader. Well, ok, I'm also concerned about other classes' situations. Let's go"

Contrary to our bad feeling, along with Horikita who proceeded with heavy movements, we set out for the beach where C class was waiting.

Part 2 (a)

Just before passing through the forest, from the bushes we saw a lot of C class students on the beach. The situation we were looking at had been far beyond our imagination.

"It can't be... This kind of stuff... Is it possible?"

As if she couldn't believe the sight, Horikita was repeating "impossible" many times over.

I thought the same. It was a pattern we didn't expect at all. There weren't only provisional toilets and a shower room installed. Turf with sunlight protection, barbecue set, chairs, parasols, snacks and drinks. There were all kinds of equipment necessary for entertainment.

Smoke from a burning meat and laughter. On the coast, the students were loudly enjoying the sea while the water bikes were running through. Even with only roughly calculating the visible range, more than 150 points were spit out.

"What the hell is C class doing? Does this mean they don't have to save points?"

We could only think that way looking at this. It exceeded the level of splurging.

"Let's check that out. What the hell is C class thinking doing this?"

The two of us walked in on the beach from the bushes, stepping firmly on the sand. One of the male students noticed us and called out to the boy nearby. We

couldn't see his face from here well because he leaned his body on a chair. One of the boys immediately rushed to us.

"Err, Ryuuen-san called..."

Said the male student somewhat frightened, or perhaps I should say without drives.

"Just like a king. Using classmates like this. Looks like we're welcomed by the king. What are we going to do?"

"That's on you to decide, Horikita."

"Alright. I wanna know what's going on. Let's go."

We accepted and accompanied the male student. A savory smell of burned meat got into our noses as we approached the sea.

".....This is outrageous."

I realized again how we're not enjoying vacation even a little.

We drew near the guy who seemed to had commanded this dionysia.

"Hey. Were you the one secretly snooping around? What do you want from me?"

"You're doing very good. This really looks like an extravagant spree."

Ryuuen, who was tanning in the chair in his swimsuit, showed his white teeth.

"As you can see. We're enjoying summer vacation." He said this spreading his hands, showing off the entertainment that fully unfolded on the beach.

"This is the trial. Do you understand what that means? Although I'm shocked that you don't understand the rules themselves..."

He was rather disappointed than delighted, being alerted about his incompetence.

"Oh? I'm amazed. Does that mean you're showing humanity even to an enemy like me?"

"If the ones at the top are incompetent, then those under will deal with hardships. That's only pitiful."

Ryuuuen only laughed, taking a plastic bottle of water that was next to the radio.

"How much did you use to enjoy this much of pleasure?"

"Hah. I wonder. I didn't neatly calculated." Without hiding, Ryuuuen answered.

"Jeez. It's already getting warmer. Hey, Ishizaki. Bring ice-cold water." He said, throwing away about half of the remaining water in sand provokingly.

Ishizaki, who was playing volleyball in vicinity, rushed to get the water into the tent. A large number of what appeared to be card-boxes with food and water were carelessly piled up in the tent. Sakazaki looked into a cooler box next to the boxes.

"As you can see we're only enjoying summer vacation. Basically, it's impossible for us to become your enemies during the trial. Do you understand?"

As if she's having a headache, Horikita pressed her forehead in non-understanding, creating wrinkles between the eyebrows.

"It's not about being enemies, but the matter we said before. I was foolish for being alerted and coming here."

"Who's foolish? Is it really me? Or is it you?" Far from accepting insults, Ryuuuen clapped back at Horikita likewise.

"Survival on this awfully hot inhabited island? Isn't that a joke? In order to pick up 100 or 200 small class points you, the lowest D class, have to put up with hunger, heat and emptiness. You're making me laugh by just imagining it."

Running over the sandy beach, Ishizaki came back with new water dripping with sweat, handing over to Ryuuuen what looked like a cold pet bottle. However, the moment Ryuuuen took the bottle he threw it at Ishizaki's body.

"I said bring ice-cold water. This one is still warm."

"B...B-but."



"Huh?"

Ryuuuen's sharp pupils resembled those of a snake. Making his body stiffened, Ishizaki picked up the pet bottle and ran toward the tent again.

"... This trial is about endurance, calculation and cooperation. That seems impossible for you from the beginning. You can't even set up a proper plan."

You couldn't even last a week using points this lavishly. Living hell would arrive sometime soon. And at that time things like turfs, parasols and chairs would only become obstacles.

"Cooperation? Don't make me laugh. People easily betray. Lie. Relationships involving trust aren't practical. You can only trust yourself. If your scouting is finished then leave. Well, if you truly desire you're welcomed. You can enjoy yourself as you like, whether it's eating meat or having fun on the water bike. Or would you like a different type of entertainment with me? I'll prepare a tent for personal use."

"Not an answer I would expect from someone who has declared war before."

"I hate hard work. Patience? Saving? You must be kidding."

Ishizaki came back again and stretched out the water. After receiving the water, Ryuuuen opened the cap and drank it up.

"This is my way of doing things. No more, no less."

"Right. Well, do as you please. It works fine with us."

Part 2(b)

Horikita surely made the same thought in her head. The fact that now, C class is no longer a problem, they are already out of the competition.

"In order to find out the situation of the other classes, we shed our sweat moving around, so your efforts are really appreciated"

Horikita turned around to leave, but as she made a step to move, she hesitated and stopped.

"There is just one more matter. You know Ibuki, right?"

"Ah, yes! She is a member of our class. What about her, though?"

"Her face is swollen. What is the meaning of this? Who did this to her?"

Almost as having decided who the culprit is, Horikita made an indirect hint towards him

"Heh? I thought she ran away. What? After all, she asked help from the members of another class instead of her own, right? What a pitiful woman!"

Ryuuken laughed scornfully and once more he lied down.

"Within this world, there are a lot of hopeless idiots, a ruler of command does not need underlings that go against his will. It was decided that I get to use the points of my class as I like. That is a matter of decision. Besides, it would be pointless if somebody was about to rise in revolt"

"In other words, the way Ibuki ended up meeting us, is related to the way you used the points"

"Well, if you want to think of it in a simple manner, I guess it is. That is why we gave her a light punishment"

Saying that he made a movement like giving a punch to an invisible cheek. Just as I thought it was Ryuuken who punched her face.

"There was another guy who defied me. I expelled him, too, of course. I learned from some piece of information that he is not dead, but he is somewhere living by lying on the grass trying to catch bugs to eat."

I did not feel that this was a remark towards a friend. However, here we must agree on one thing. We found out about Ibuki's absence during the roll call, so her absence has no effect whatsoever on C class. That is why her classmates did not bother to look for her at all. Horikita noticed the fact that all this was done in order to delay us.

That's right. Since the beginning of this examination, we were granted with 300 points, if now they are minus these points, then they are as good as lost already. Where and how? And more importantly. Who had the idea to use all the points? The effect of this decision is nonexistent at the moment.

"So, that's how it is. It is me who used all our points. Ibuki is not the kind of person that she would be charmed by points. So, do not mind about her. Besides that is what we call freedom, right?"

"Well... It is definitely an unexpected turn of events to be with 0 points"

That is exactly what a minus factor is. They are going to negate this with their 0 point strategy. It is an unexpected way of fighting, but even though it will not help them reach the highest ranks it will definitely not let C class end up at the bottom. Even if the leaders of all the classes are proven to be the right choices, they cannot expand their points more than 150.

"If Ibuki was really at your place, then it would be better that you have expelled her already. Your awkward sympathy will not help her. Plus, it will save you provisions that you waste for one extra member, for water and food and bed and other arrangements. Anyhow, you do not have to put up with this any longer, she can come back now. If she kneels and begs for forgiveness, I will allow her comeback, with a generous heart"

He seems to have the conviction that even if they defy him and run away, in the end, they will return to him. Actually, he knows it would be difficult for Ibuki to live all alone for a week in a deserted island.

"It is a simplistic way of thinking, right? You may think that I am doing this for the favour of the points. But even if there is something else hidden, what are you planning to do? After all, even the simple task of finding food, here, is a hardship"

"Hehehe, well what should I do? After all ordinary people have to express their uncomplicated ideas. You have become desperate into protecting the points bestowed to us, who to choose for a leader, to find and protect a spot for the team, searching in the woods for provisions drenched in sweat, completely foolish"

Even if we want to see the truth it is unreachable. His state of things is not just confusing, Ryuuen's way of thinking is just laughable.

"That's enough. Ayanokouji let's go back already. If we do not go back now, I am going to feel sick."

"We'll talk again, Suzune"

As this conversation was about to end Ryuuen seems to remember Horikita's first name.

"Well, confident women are not unpleasant to me. Anyway, I will let you submit in front of me. That time will be the ultimate moment and I will savor it."

Saying that Ryuuken, with his own hands nearly touched his groin above his swimsuit and made a gesture of provocation. As Horikita put the whole of her disdain in one look, eventually she turned her back pretending not to see this scene and begun to walk away. I was just about to leave, too, but a different scene caught my eye. I watched at the pier one boat, also students swimming in the water, or playing volleyball, a flag, also some students doing barbecue and celebrating. I saw a tent on the beach where they are stocking food. Apparently, Ryuuken intends to ridicule the school rules thoroughly.

"Unexpectedly for C class. They will be saved by their own self-destruction"

"It seems that this is the case. For real they have used all their points, already"

Even if they save some points by using all the points, I cannot see it. These are the points that are saved when Ibuki and another one student are absent from roll call.

"I do not care to think about the trouble that might happen later"

"I am sorry but, C class will not be in trouble in this exam"

"It won't be in trouble? How come? There is no way you can endure this exam without having any points."

"That is alright. Besides, this is exactly Ryuuken's goal. The points that was given was our fund, for a one week vacation to enjoy ourselves no matter how impossible it seems. However, no matter how simple and prudent we are with food, or with other necessities there will be no favourable conclusion. Our school makes these kind of rules, in this manner"

Understanding this, Horikita nodded in agreement

"So we are trying to save resources in order to overcome the week"

"Ah, but Ryuuken's plan is quite different. For one week he cannot see the situation past the end of his nose"

“He cannot see... what... for over a week”

“Let me say this differently. What if the exam ended today, what would you do?. Do you think that this whole thing will turn into a real vacation?”

“That’s right.... I understand. But after all what is crucial? If you have 0 points in your hands.”

“That is a simple-minded conclusion. Well, that is something like Kouenji would do anyway”

“Eh?!”

“He is in bad physical condition and mentally unstable. He should use these things as a reason and retire already. Then everyone can return to the ship and back to their normal everyday life. This is what it means that you can fully enjoy the summer vacation without any hardships”

I cannot deny that the school’s behavior is almost sick on this examination. 300 points are only enough to use freely for a 2 day 1 night vacation. But change will come even if we feign ignorance in repeat.

“Well, then that means he has abandoned the exams from the very start, for real?”

Well, this might not be just a theory. Maybe Ryuuken wanted to avoid the troubles that would occur, or maybe he wanted to conserve physical strength by avoiding mental strength for survival. Or it was just for boosting the morale?

“This exam is literally free. Ryuuken’s way of thinking is not completely wrong and one of his plans might actually hold the correct answer. In C class Ibuki and another student seem to be absent due to a violent rebellion and it results in saving 20 points each day. However, if you are going to lose points no matter how much you are trying to save them, then you might need a drastic strategy.”

I cannot guess because I do not know exactly when he decided to get rid of all the points and at what timing.

“We should be thinking about a method to take the points back without giving up. His method is absolutely wrong. I do not understand it.”

That’s right. I can hardly understand what Ryuuken is thinking. However, as we

talked, I believe that there was a certain effect of the measures he took. Everyone who saw this situation should feel not only anxious, but also afraid, especially about the bizarre trickery of Ryuuken. This impression will not fade away so easily. However, I am not sure if he was aiming from the start to do all these.

After passing through the sandy beach, I turned back to look around the beach one more time.

“A 0 points tactic... huh? I get it. This is intriguing.”

It would be a quite interesting way, if we were able to actually shut down the objections of our classmates. Again, this exam is not only about saving points. We have to plot strategies in order to win. What happened earlier, it was certainly a scene that made me feel like this.

Part 3(a)

Having decided to check situations of A and B class in order to effectively use our spare time, we proceeded going into the forest from the root of a broken big tree as Kanzaki told us. When I think about it now, the tree wasn't broken naturally but was created by the school as a sign. I can't help having a feeling it was a hint that there was a spot ahead.

The moment we walked into the deep forest, we noticed some change. It was easy to walk through since there were traces of a lot of students beating the path. By simply following the trail we reached B class campsite. That could also be a reason why Kanzaki didn't give a detailed explanation. Mosquitoes watching for a chance to jump on our arms and legs sucking our blood were quite a pain in the ass.

Soon after, we reached B class campsite.

“I wonder if it's gonna look like as one would expect of B class...”

There was a completely different view of life from that of D class when we arrived at the campsite. Well's surroundings that was used as a spot was fickle and there was no space to spread 3 or 4 tents for 8 people. They secured a space to stay by supplementing tents for hammocks. Even though we started in the same way, the items they used were completely different. One unfamiliar

device that was placed near the well caught my eye, but the unique atmosphere around B class was what surprised me the most.

“Huh? Horikita-san? And Ayanokouji-kun?”

As if sensing a presence of sudden visitors, a girl who was tying a string to attach a hammock to a tree turned her head toward us and called out. A figure in jersey resembled a lot of Ichinose. A little far away was Kanzaki.

“The class is functioning surprisingly well. Although you are facing many hardships with your base.”

“Ahaha. It was hard at first. But I tried figuring out various ways and I’ve made it work. Although there’s still plenty of work to be done.” Said Ichinose smiling while finishing tying the rope tightly.

“Then I assume it’s wrong to be in your way.”

“I’m sorry. I guess that has become a way of leave-taking. It’s okay to take some break, right? I wonder if you came to visit to ask me something.”

Without detest, Ichinose encouraged us to sit on the hammock, but instead decided to sit on herself since Horikita refused her offer.

“I wonder if it’s okay to think we’re more or less in a cooperative relationship since the last time.”

“At least I think that way.”

“Well, how many points did you use so far? On what did you use points? And if you could tell us the rating of your tools, we’d be saved. We’d tell some information as well, of course.”

I wonder if Kanzaki could estimate what we were planning to do seeing us that morning. We wanted to negotiate after being sure it wouldn’t become a hard blow if we inform them directly. Ichinose smiled and took out the manual from her bag. While showing that they had a list of what they bought on a blank paper, she read it out loud:

“Hammock, cookware, small tent, lantern and provisional toilet. Fishing rod and water shower... If we combine it with food, it’s a total of 70 points.”



Excluding Kouenji who retired, we almost had the same utilization rate as B class.

"What's water shower? I'd like to know."

Although we figured out it had something to do with bathroom based on the name, since it was 5 points cheaper than provisional toilet we concluded that its effectiveness is weak and passed up the installation.

"Well then, let's explain the situation little by little, shall we? Since there are various places containing fruits and vegetables in the woods, we substitute shortage with points while searching for supplies. Then we go to the sea and catch some fish too. That's what we eat. We're not worried about water since we have a well."

Did B class ended up obtaining this place because Kushida and others found several fruits? Even judging by the word "vegetable", should we look at it as being their fruit of labor in comparison to D class?

Ichinose took us to the front of the well, moved a pulley and with a wooden bucket scooped up the water.

"At first there was a danger of water being polluted so I was worried if we should drink it, but looking from the cultivated food and surrounding environment I concluded the well was well-managed. For caution's sake only I tried drinking it yesterday. I waited some time but I didn't got diarrhea. From this morning everyone's sharing and using well's water."

So they didn't jump at water well from the beginning, but they started using it after they checked it out properly. Although it could become something you would naturally want to drink lured by having a point saver right under your nose.

"I also figured the amount of water is abundant. It'd be enough even using it for shower. This is water shower."

As expected, it was the large machine place next to the well.

"I can make hot water in a few seconds when I put water in this tank. It's convenient. I'm using it now since heat source from the gas can can be removed . If it runs out, I ask for supplementation."

Horikita asked Ichinose, who explained a usage of unexpected tool as something ordinary, rather mockingly: "Did you know about this water

shower?"

"No. I've just heard and used it for the first time. The school rules are pretty scary, aren't they? There aren't any details in the manual. You can't ask teachers detailed questions either. We were saved because there's a kid in our class that's familial with outdoor activities."

There was a single-button-press type of tent in a set with a simple toilet near the water shower. There was nothing inside.

"We're using this instead of a shower room so that kids who hate being seen by others while taking a shower can be able to use it. The fabric is also waterproof."

So that's why it's empty. It makes sense since the ground inside the tent is wet.

"You don't have trouble with the hard ground when you go to sleep?"

"Ah-yes. I thought of what to do first, but I took appropriate measures. Wanna see?"

After receiving objections from the babbling girls who were inside, Ichinose lifted a little under the tent.

Part 3(b)

Under the tent is spread a thick vinyl, which thickness is about 2 cm.

"When we paid with our points for a simple toilet, it was a rule that the usage of vinyl was unlimited. Maybe I used too much, but we had it already in large quantities. Of course, I do not want to waste our resources, so I am planning to use a lot of our unused vinyl at once. I intend to return it all in the end "

"By the way, how about measures against the heat? It feels somehow cooler around here"

"I wonder if it is because we are sprinkling water. Because we are close to the water well. We can sprinkle water around here, casually. We are putting the water in plastic bottles and give to everyone to carry them around, so this happens pretty quickly. The soil is easy to soak in water, because we release it in a long period of time. The effect lasts and it takes away the heat by

evaporation quite efficiently”

Ichinose and the rest seem that they are not depending on tools, but they enjoy their camping life using their wisdom. Additionally, Horikita brought us information about class B and she made them explain their situation properly, so, we'd better not cut corners around here and do not forget the spirit of fairness.

“I see.... It is hard that you came out of retirement”

“Yes. But, there are still a lot of uneasy things that need to be fixed in our class, so I will try to fix them, somehow”

“That's right. Is it ok with you to continue this cooperative relationship? Also, we could exclude the rule to find out the identity of the leader for our respective classes. What do you think?

“I was thinking too, that we should talk about this. I would appreciate If we could break away from the whole subject of honoring the class. If you, do not mind, Ichinose, I would like you to accept the proposal”

“Of course, it's ok”

Having finished the task of reconfirming information exchange and cooperation relations one after another, Horikita looked around and let out a deep sigh. There is a feeling of solidarity in perfect order, where each student acts with their respective role. In addition to that, we can see that everyone is doing their part happily. Of course, there are some who do something that they hate, or they try to skip it.

“This class... It is going better than I'd imagined. After all it is you who lead them, right?”

That means that Ichinose gathers up and commands firmly the class in school as well as outside of school.

“And is there a person that gathers everyone's approval in D class? Is it you Horikita?

“No. Since we have Hirata, who is a boy and everyone in class is gathering around him”

"Ah! That boy from the football club! I know, I know. He is very popular among girls."

Horikita is really not interested in talking about Hirata, so she moved away from the topic.

"Ichinose, I am sorry that I only ask you questions, but we would like to confirm the situation of A class. Is there something that it could help us reach their base camp? Even a hint of the place that they set it up, it would be of great help"

"Even a small hint would 'probably' be useful in order to find out their location. However, don't you think it is difficult to obtain information?"

As expected of B class. Or should I say better, as expected of Ichinose, they have done their research already about A class.

"As you leave this place, there is an opening. Turn right from there and then, all straight, where you can meet a cave. Class A seems to be camping there....probably. I have already checked myself, going there with my own two legs, but I did not understand things properly. That's because of all the secretiveness, or putting it in other words, their defense is thorough"

"Secretiveness? What kind of measures has A class taken?"

"Seeing is believing. I think that you'll understand by a single glance, when you see it. Since from now on, you are going to A class, does that mean that you two already know the situation of C class?"

"Yes. We just went there, a little while ago. They did such incredibly stupid things, that we could not just believe all these"

"Yup. It seems that they do not intend to work on the exam seriously. The remaining 5 days. It is clearly visible that they will run sort of their points, before the exam is over. I do not think they can change the situation, even if they are switching into saving mode, immediately. They do not even looking for a spot. I wonder if they find it difficult to understand the purpose of this exam even for a little?"

Ichinose, too, did not seem able to derive the right answer, either.

"Sly tricks cannot help you in this exam. Ryuuuen will certainly exhaust all the points. Although it may be fun for now, later he will absolutely regret it"

Horikita talked to Ichinose daringly, but she did not talk about the succession plan that I told her about. But it seemed to me that Ichinose would find out about it sooner or later.

"I am sorry to interrupt you. Ichinose, do you know where Nakanishi is?"

In the middle of the conversation, a male student appeared and asked with modesty.

"Could Nakanishi have gone to the shore at this time? What for?"

"He went there to offer some help. He should not have? Was it unnecessary?"

"No, that's not it. Kaneda is really nice and always helpful. Well, then can you follow up Chihiro and bring them back? I will be alright as long as you tell them that I said that"

"Understood. Thank you very much"

Horikita looked curiously over this short exchange.

"It seems he is quite formal, when talking to his classmates"

"Ah, he.."

"Is he C class student, or..?"

Then Ichinose responded to my words before I even get to ask further and I just nodded.

"Did you notice? He seems to be faithful to C class. He was saying that we'd better leave him alone, but I did not want to let him go. I have not heard what caused his situation because I do not want to talk about it"

Apart from Ibuki, another student run away because he opposed Ryuuuen's ways. Apparently it seems that it was picked up by B class. So maybe he found a place to offer something in cooperation instead of staying in a humiliating situation.

"We also picked up a student yesterday, a student escaping C class"

Horikita speaks as she has met Ryuuuen a little while ago and has heard the

details. It seems that this student is one of the two who rebelled against Ryuuuen. Ibuki is the other one, who seems that she was also beaten.

After hearing all this Ichinose's glare hardened as a determination to protect further her team.

"Let's go now Ayanokouji. It is bad for B class, for us to linger around here, any longer"

Horikita and I separated from Ichinose quickly, we started walking, leaving behind us the grounds of class B.

"Well, I cannot help talking about D class and the high compatibility of our members"

After leaving class and becoming unpopular Horikita's words can be taken as a defeat. However, I have the same impression with Horikita. There is already a big difference between class B and class C. And it is not just a points difference.

"Well, it cannot be helped. B class has a special ability that D class lacks of"

"That is teamwork, right? B class seems to be the superior class. It is kept under control with a firm hand by a great leadership so it cannot be manipulated or be divided."

In D class there is a selfish student like Kouenji who takes charge of the class team and runs away in difficult times and there is no student with the power to stop him. Meanwhile, Ichinose put together class B, which seemed to have a united force that did not get disturbed by a single string. That may be the biggest difference between D class and B class right now. The longer it takes the struggle for the completion of the exam, the more obvious the difference will become.

Part 4

Coming out from the deep forest, a cave showed its appearance of what looked like a demon opening its mouth. There were two provisional toilets and one shower room near the cave.

"I can't see what's inside from here..."

It was near impossible to confirm while taking a distance in a hiding place.

Both Horikita and I didn't know anyone from A class so planning to gather information while being hidden, even in a stealthily way, would lead us nowhere. I went ahead of Horikita who hid herself and stepped on a road that led to the cave.

"Hey, wait a minute."

"Let's go. It's A class – of course we'll be frightened. But there isn't much to do about that."

Together with Horikita, I headed towards the cave I thought to be A class' camp base.

"What are you thinking? There's no advantage even if we carelessly expose ourselves to them."

"You think being in hiding does? We can hardly see the facility and there's no one around. There are many things that cannot be seen unless we enter the cave."

"...Isn't it too quiet? What do you think?"

"I don't think so. Please don't worry about it."

"I don't get your half-assed responses, but okay."

She was staring at me with terribly cold and scary eyes, but I pretended I hadn't noticed them.

Naturally, we were seen by A class students who were in a vicinity when we arrived at the entrance of the cave. Although I expected I could check the situation to a certain extent if I could see the interior of the cave directly...

A huge blindfold connecting the vinyls was spread out so I couldn't see anything inside.

"Who are you? From which class are you coming?"

This guy was for sure... Yahiko who was one of the two people who found the cave promptly on the first day. The other bright one – Katsuragi – seemed to be absent.

"We came to snoop around. You have problems with that?"

Oh, as if she changed her way of thinking for a moment Horikita's response was imposing. Then she continued:

"Now that you revealed yourself as A class, no doubt you're leading a tough life..."

She sighed affectedly when she saw the entrance of the vinyl-covered cage.

"Rather than being tough, it's a makeshift. A coward method, right."

"What?" Yahiko clapped back at with an irritated tone as if she got on his nerves although it was an easy-to-understand provocation.

"I'm Horikita from D class."

"Huh, I'd say myself you're D class. You're a bunch of weak-headed."

"Weak-headed, right. Therefore there won't be any particular impact even if you show us what's inside, right? Or does it put you in an uncomfortable position by us just being able to see inside?"

"It could be the case!"

"So it's not a problem if you show us inside? Sorry for bothering you."

"Wa-wait! Hey! Wait! Don't do things as you please!"

Yahiko cut in so he could stand in Horikita's way, but then Horikita's words jumped in like a knife: "I'll just look inside. That won't be a rule violation itself right?"

"Stop playing around, this is occupied by A class! D class has no permission to use it!"

"Really? You occupied this place? I didn't know that. Is the device inside?"

"Y-yes. Therefore step back!"

"There are no rules saying you can't go inside the cave without problems. Sure, you can't use the cave while being occupied, but it's different from monopolization. We should also have rights to check out the inside or the device, right? Otherwise we'd be able to forcibly monopolize all stops. That's not what the trial is about."

"Huh...!?" A sharp argument like this had stabbed Yahiko without problems.

Horikita tried to tear off the veil of the cave that was hidden in vinyl while seducing with her hair. However....

“What are you doing. I don’t remember approving to call guests.”

A large-statured boy passed me from behind and continued walking toward Horikita. Certainly, his name was...

“Katsuragi-san! Those guys came to snoop around our crib! They are a filthy bunch.”

“You’re exaggerating stuff, it’s just vinyl. Show me just a little bit inside.”

Viewing back, Horikita wasn’t even a bit frightened of confronting those guys.

“Then it should be okay to take a look inside. But be prepared. If you touch things even once, I’ll notify your actions to the school as an obstructive act toward another class. I can’t be sure what will happen to D class then.”

Katsuragi’s words were probably a bluff. It was unlikely to be disqualified from touching vinyl. And yet, him saying he’ll sue us invoked the slightest danger.

“I’ve explained to him as well, but this is an overbearing monopoly act. It isn’t a right protected by rules.”

“No doubt that’s right. That point is certain. But I think this is like an implicit rule. You guys from D class have a spot near the river. B class has a well. I’m occupying the land so that is monopolized partly. Have you used force on someone trespassing your land?”

The calm and hefty words of Katsuragi stopped Horikita’s legs without prevention.

“One class holds one occupied spot. And they keep on protecting it while continuing to obtain points until the end of the test. If you break this implicit rule, havoc will happen. Of course, A class will step into the D class’ base camp as a retribution. Troubles should be avoided.”

It was possible to ignore these words, but we couldn’t. As Katsuragi was saying, the other classes unconsciously seized a spot forcefully as well. Troubles could arise with breaking that rule. Horikita turned around and passed by Katsuragi while going away from the entrance of the cave.

“Well then. I’m looking forward to seeing the results of A class’ ability.”

“It’s very powerful. We as well anticipate D class’ useless resistance.”

After the short conversation, Horikita sank. Or should I say, it killed her enthusiasm. If Katsuragi hadn’t showed up, Horikita would have stepped into the other side of vinyl.

“Yahiko, don’t jump on cheap provocations. It is her goal to forcefully steal a glance of the inside. It is the other side that goes down if you thrust your dominance and righteous in their face.”

“S-sorry.”

So, they managed to put Horikita who instantly settled for retreat out of the way. Splendid.

“It seems there is no other option beside leaving A class alone. It’s impossible to investigate.”

They built up impregnable defenses once the exclusive spot of the cave was seized. However, no matter how much they tried to hide the interior we could figure out it was something provable.

Chapter 3: The Meaning of Freedom

The questions Kouenji asked Sakura and I had been on my mind for a long time. On day 3, I left the base camp just before noon and turned my feet to enter the forest. Just then, there was a girl who came near, running from behind.

“Gasp, gasp, pant... what are you planning to do now, Ayanokouji-kun?”

Sakura came running like she was searching for me. She exhaled and with every breath, her big breasts moved up and down.

“Have I not tied a handkerchief to a tree? I’m going there to check something out.”

I wanted to confirm if it was true at an earlier date but I hardly had the time to do it.

“Wow..... I know I shouldn’t come..... right? I’d be a hindrance, but.....”

“You shouldn’t do it. Aren’t you worried about the various rumours in circulation?”

“It doesn’t bother me at all. Besides..... mumble mumble”

With a whisper, she coughed something out but even though I drew my ear near, I couldn’t comprehend it. Her voice was that low.

“I don’t think this would be a fun thing to do, though? After coming to this island at great pains, I think it’d be better for you to have a little fun.... even though I don’t have a fun side myself.”

I decided to turn down Sakura’s proposal with an appropriate excuse. But...

“Well, doing that is fun for me!”

Sakura recoiled, feeling bad more than I imagined. At those strong words, our eyes met with a look of horror. Then Sakura squatted down, hiding her face.

"Flustered... Ahhh, in other words, this will be different! Urghhh!!"

....I didn't know exactly what Sakura was saying. All I could tell was she's an interesting girl. She only had to show this part of herself to others.

"Well then, should we go together? There's a condition. Later, even if we get in trouble, you won't blame yourself."

"It's okay!?"

She replied while hiding her face with her hands. What kind of exchange was this....

On the way, finding the silence weird, I decided to kill time by bringing up a familiar topic. Nothing could be more awkward than the lone sound of crispy and crunchy footsteps on the soil.

"Are you doing well with the girls' company? For this kind of life, you can't do it alone."

"Nuh-uh, not at all. I don't even talk to them, nor do I something else."

As if I was embarrassed by my pathetic self, I coughed while rolling a strand of hair with my index finger.

"I really can't do anything. I can neither study nor do sports, I'm never improving in anything."

"That's not true at all. Sakura-chan is improving steadily."

"Ehhh? Me, improving? Hahahah..... No way."

"It's true. Maybe you may not see it yourself, but little by little, you're surely growing."

I conveyed these things, not only by words but also through my behaviour. It's effective for types that aren't confident like Sakura. It was the first time I made an appeal with words from the bottom of my heart, hoping they could ring out in my partner's heart too. Sakura stopped walking and looked at me with wavering eyes. Like those words didn't come from me. She was unconsciously trying to find the true meaning of my words.

"It's okay. Sakura can make new friends soon. School will be even more fun."

When our eyes met, Sakura hurriedly averted her gaze and looked down.

Even the fact that she managed to look at people for one moment. Even taking in only one reaction from others was such a great difference from when we first met.

“That said... it seems like that man retired after the incident.”

That man worked at an electronics retail store located on the school's premises. That man was an extremely enthusiastic fan of Sakura when she was a gravure idol.... No, he was more of a stalker. He wasn't satisfied with only spending all his time on Sakura's homepage but if there was a chance, he would attempt any contact with her and I understood he was up to something.

“Thanks for that time..... It's all thanks to Ayanokouji-kun.”

“I didn't do anything. Sakura has been saved only because Kushida became close with you and because Horikita and Ichinose cooperated, while I was like a bystander. Apart from that, nothing strange happened from that incident?”

Even though the stalker left the school grounds, it's also possible to make contact through the internet.

“Yeah, it's all ok. Now, the bulletin board's people are also taking a little break.”

This was by way of precaution, right? I think they made a good choice.

“And yet, even if you were nervous and frightened when you were an idol, you always had a dignified expression.”

“About that..... basically, I wanted to take photographs by myself.”

“Long ago? Were they selfies in the magazines?”

Sakura, who heard it, answered with a little bitter smile.

“It didn't go well at all and I took much more time than others. Also, a cameraman would take shots of all the girls to reduce the number of people involved as much as possible. Besides.... as if I was without emotion when I erased myself, I could endure it emptily. But, in the end, since I reached my breaking point, I stopped doing it.”

Because she talked without pausing, Sakura suddenly paused a moment and breathed in and out. The case of the stalker seemed to have left a big scar on Sakura, but it's all turning for the better.

Before our eyes, there was quite a thick bunch of trees. I left Sakura's side and went ahead to lead and open a path. If Sakura ended up hurt because of the branches, there'd be a lot of trouble. Then, after continuing walking for a while, I felt that the front of the path was becoming steep so I decided it'd be better to take a break soon.

I looked back. I never thought that looking back, I would see Sakura trembling with shaking shoulders.

"Let's take a break. It'll take a little while longer to reach the destination."

Sakura would be exhausted if we walked on such a wild trail for 30 minutes. She was just beginning to look a little happy.

I searched for a big tree that could protect us with shade from the weather that was becoming hotter and hotter. I sat down between the roots in a space where two people could sit well. However, Sakura, maybe for precaution or modesty, wanted to sit a little apart. But the ground was uneven, and it would only hurt if she sat there.

"Sit down here."

"Is it okay?"

"Here is good. But we won't ever get enough rest in this place."

"Mhm, yes...."

After the short interaction, Sakura sank down next to me, keeping her distance. It's a distance where the sleeves of our gym uniforms were touching slightly.

"Nature is amazing, isn't it..... I just like to spend a lot of precious time even only walking around for a while."

"Considering that Kouenji seemed disappointed, it looks like this place is still good enough for the school that tended to it with great care. Going to a jungle overseas would have brought more dangers."

"When we departed at the beginning, I was very depressed. I had no friends, nor did I enjoy travelling. And I thought it'd be better to confine myself to my room. Because like that, it'd be the same as always. But then, this happened. We've been told this would be a trial...."

I placed my back on the tree and Sakura looked up at the sky.

"But, this moment... I think that it was good that we've come here, together even for a little. I never had the opportunity to chat with you like this at school, Ayanokouji-kun..."

It seemed that sitting within the deep woods, wrapped in nature, brought a feeling of calmness.

"I wish we could stay like this forever!"

"Yes, that would be nice."

It was still the third day since we had come to the deserted island and I felt like I'd spent the longest time just being with Sakura. I wondered if this was some kind of a mutual arrangement between people who did not have friends.

However, it did not feel strange and it did not happen in vain. As Sakura said, I felt like the distance between us had shortened a little.

It wasn't a love affair or something like that, but indeed, we became friends. Our relationship changed so suddenly that I did not even understand when it had begun to actually change.

"Hmm... It's a pity. If we had a digital camera, we could have taken the best photos..."

Sakura made a thumbs-up with both her hands, but instantly she felt embarrassed by the gesture and regret showed on her face.

Certainly, cameras are essential in shaping memories. A certain form remains intact.

As I remembered watching Sakura at school carrying a digital camera and taking photos all the time, I thought that this moment must be a perfect shuttered chance for her.

So that a certain form remained intact... I see why Ibuki had a digital camera.



"However, when we enter the photo, does that mean that we also mess up the scenery?"

"If there is Ayanokouji-kun, then it seems that it'll be the best one.. Ah!.. No!!.. I mean.. That's because I've never taken any pictures together with a friend!"

Sakura kept denying what she said, shaking her face. It's genuinely natural. At that point, I had conclusive evidence.

While sitting side by side, I suddenly stared at Sakura.

At first, Sakura did not notice that my eyes were watching her, but as our long silence continued, she finally noticed it.

"Wh... What? What is it?

"Hey! Calm down. Be quiet."

I firmly held Sakura, who had fallen into a panic, on both her shoulders.

"Kyaaaaa!!"

As I held Sakura's body closer to mine, she was unable to move, like a frog snatched by a snake. I took a peek at Sakura over her head. I saw something moving... a bug was crawling on Sakura's hair. Even I, who didn't know a lot about insects, could easily identify it. It's what we commonly call "a caterpillar".

For real, just by looking at it, I felt sick. A body that moved, and attached to the body, a myriad of limbs that were moving too, so that it's too much to make the spine straight. Apparently, it fell from the leaves of the tree we used as a backrest.

Well, what should I do now? If I were to tell Sakura that there was a caterpillar in her hair, then, the possibility that she would panic and start screaming was high. If the caterpillar entered between her hair or went into her clothes, then it would be a further disaster.

"Sakura, there is something I want to ask you."

"Wh.. What is it?"

"Well... Are you okay with insects?"

"I.. Insects?"

"Yes, insects, like grasshoppers or dragonflies, those kinds of insects."

"N.. Not good at all with any of them. I can't stand ants, either."

"Ah, well, I get it."

Just as I had guessed, it seemed that I couldn't tell her what was happening. There was no alternative but to think of another way. I wish I could remove it quickly, but being a city boy myself, I hate them, too.

Even if I tried to remove it with a branch or something, Sakura would immediately notice my suspicious behaviour.

"Let me see, now. Do not move for the time being, okay?

"Ah, yes. All right."

After I gave her this advice, I let go of Sakura's shoulder. Meanwhile, the caterpillar was moving little by little — it seemed like it was going somewhere.

I had to think of a way to remove it safely.

"What's wrong?"

Sakura tilted her head, puzzled, as I was trying to make a plan in my head.

Did it sense danger just by the movement of my hands? The caterpillar was trying to escape with strenuous movements. Aahhh... This is dangerous, caterpillar, stop being so stubborn!

This was going too far. But, I had to save Sakura, even at my own cost. I endured courageously, with my hands shaking, and with my right hand, I reached for Sakura's hair as quickly as I could. Here! I could feel my fingertips touching the caterpillar. So, I grabbed it faster than my conscious judgement allowed me and threw it into the bushes.

Sakura couldn't even swallow as I made such a move, but still, I managed to protect her.

"Uh... Somehow I felt that you saved me from something unpleasant..."

After a proper break, we arrived at our destination with the help of the mark by the handkerchief, while having a friendly chat.

It seemed to me as though it had taken less time than I thought. We arrived in 20 minutes. For the time being, I wrapped the handkerchief carefully and

returned it to Sakura. I would try to observe the surroundings where I thought Kouenji had been standing. I couldn't tell the difference by walking into the forest so far, especially at first glance. I wonder if it is here? There is nothing else around, here? What is the meaning of this?

"Did you see something?"

"Eh... something feels different."

If you couldn't take the necessary information from your sense of sight, then you would have to rely on your other senses.

"For now, let's investigate around here randomly. However, we will check regularly without diverging from each other to the point that we can't see each other anymore. If we are concentrating too much on finding something, it's easy to become careless."

We searched through the roots and bottom of big trees that couldn't be seen while standing, green leaves and branches that grew thickly above our heads and the soil using our hands. Sometimes, the hot wind would quietly hit our noses and ears. While stimulating the five usable senses, we were checking the area without overlooking even the slightest change.

"Ah!"

A surprised voice similar to a shriek came from Sakura, who was searching the bushes a little far away. The bushes were so deep, I could only see one part of Sakura's body. I wondered if she had fallen again.

"Hey, look. I've found an amazing thing!" Sakura called me in excitement.

Looking at the bushes, there were different green leaves growing with yellow fruits sticking out from one part.

"That's.... Corn.... Right?"

"It looks like it."

I wondered if corn was growing only in this section. I was not well acquainted with plants, but it was obvious the situation was unnatural. The soil in which corn was planted is of a different color than the soil in this forest. It was proof which showed that this corn was cultivated artificially. Surrounded all around by

bushes, it was odd how they were difficult to find due to weed.

“This is what Kouenji was hinting about...”

He was aware of this existence immediately but wasn’t willing to tell us.

Anyhow, there was no doubt that based on the spot, the school frequently visited this inhabited island. When I pulled out a piece in order to check it, a beautiful ordinary-looking corn came out. This beautiful form must have come to life due to thorough management and cultivation.

“I should have brought a bag... Probably not, but I wonder if we can take them with us at once.”

There were fewer than 50 corn, but taking them all at once in our hands was impossible. It was inevitable for us to make few round trips to carry them over. I took off the shirt I was wearing.

“Huuuuuh!? Wha wha wha, what are you doing Ayanokouji-kun! That’s too soon.” Sakura dropped the corn she had in her hands and blocked the view.

“Sorry. Considering you’ve dismissed I thought it would be okay. What’s too soon...?”

I thought she wouldn’t particularly mind a man’s nakedness, but I lacked concern for her appropriate age.

“If we tie the openings of the shirt, we’ll get a substitute for a bag. We can carry more at once.”

There was fear of this place becoming harvested if people from the other classes found it while we were away. It was a risk I wanted to avoid to the utmost.

“We’ll report to other classmates and let them harvest when we return.”

“Yes.”

The unexpected big harvest made our hearts pound with excitement, but unanticipated visitors made an appearance.

“Look, Katsuragi-san! That’s an amazing amount of food!”

Concentrating her attention on corn, Sakura’s shoulders jumped in surprise.

She soon took a roundabout path and hid behind me. Seeing this, Katsuragi said a word of apology.

“Sorry, I did not mean to surprise you. This guy also had no evil intent, please forgive us.”

He gave Yahiko a harsh look, encouraging him to apologize. Like an angry puppy, Yahiko apologized, showing his low spirits. I didn’t think we would encounter them in a place like this. Katsuragi didn’t respond to us, but Yahiko noticed immediately.

“You were the one spying on us yesterday!”

Raising his voice in a shout, Sakura once again got surprised and curled herself up. Seeing this, Katsuragi dropped a fist on Yahiko’s head. A painful, sharp sound could be heard from all the way up here.

“I’m Katsuragi from A class. This is Yahiko. Since this is the second time we’ve seen each other, at least self-introduction would be alright.”

“I’m Ayanokouji from D class and this is Sakura.”

After a brief exchange of greetings, Katsuragi glanced at the large amount of corn and started walking.

“This is what you’ve found. Don’t worry, I have no intention of snatching it forcibly. But if someone else finds this spot, high chances are, it will be taken away from you.”

“There’s nothing we can do, there’s only two of us.”

Besides praying this place won’t be found, there were no other options. There was a thought of taking and hiding everything away, but the possibility of someone else finding it in the process wasn’t the lowest as well.

“Fool, one of you can stay and watch over it. Right? Katsuragi-san.”

“You’re the one who doesn’t understand, Yahiko. Don’t dismiss the danger of moving around in the forest alone. After all, actions will have its limits if both man and woman participate, not to mention if it’s only a man.”

Since Katsuragi understood this well, he acted together with Yahiko rather than alone.

“Let us help you.”

“R-really, Katsuragi-san? Working together with D class——”

Yahiko showed obvious refusal, but the words stayed in his throat, having received Katsuragi's sharp discernment.

“We appreciate your offer, but we were told by our class to be careful. They will get mad when they find out we turned to A class. Sorry, but let us decline.”

It was a promptly made lie, but Katsuragi could do nothing but withdraw after that.

“I see. If that's the case, I can't force you. But can you trust us? There's a chance we will take it all after you leave, right?”

“In that case, I have no choice but to give up on the part I hold now.”

With this answer, Katsuragi got out of the way quietly. Sakura showed signs of uneasiness and we hurriedly returned back. Having returned with Sakura to the base camp, I reported about finding corn.

“Great achievement, Ayanokouji! Sakura as well! Let's go get it right now, Yamauchi!” Standing nearby, Ike called out to Yamauchi. He then energetically dashed to us and with a force that could knock me down, he grabbed my arm, pulling me away from Sakura.

“Y-y-you! Why are you alone with Sakura with your upper body naked!? What! Hey!?”

“Calm down. That's a big misunderstanding. We didn't do anything so, calm down.”

I didn't know what sort of delusions he had, but this wasn't the time to oppose Yamauchi.

“I have to talk to Hirata. I'm sorry.”

“I trust you, Ayanokouji!”

I passed by shouting at Yamauchi in order to report the case of corn. Soon after, we formed a team of students in the camp, who would depart once again to bring corn to us. In addition, there were also plans to explore other places

and find food.

Sometime after 1PM, they returned after finishing all the harvest.

“There’s so many of it!”

We weren’t short of corn, with plenty packed in the bag.

“But it was dangerous. That guy Katsuragi from A class was nearby.”

It seemed like Katsuragi decided to follow us by staying at that place without taking away the corn. This guy seemed as if he lacked both good and bad intentions.

Chapter 4: The Silent Warfare

On the 4th day on the uninhabited island, changes started to occur little by little and we reached a turning point. I went deaf to the complaints yelled around but then, at some point, I realized that non-stop laughter filled the place. We added some Indian corn we found to the fishes Ike and others caught. Every resistance against drinking the river's water disappeared too. Some things, like the fruits that my classmates found, helped us in saving more points than we planned to get us through the trial.

Currently, the points used amounted to about 100 points, including setbacks like retirement. If we continued smoothly, we'd probably be able to finish the trial with a lot of points remaining. If we looked at D Class's situation before the start of the trial, then this number was a perfectly satisfactory numeric value. Even Yukimura, who was the most hostile and opposing party, wouldn't complain. Yes, not even one student was unsatisfied with this result.

I suddenly got a tingling feeling in my head and it hurt.

I secretly borrowed a ballpoint pen and put it in my pocket together with the folded paper. Then I left the base camp. I got started trying to know the situation of the island which I still couldn't grasp.

This might only be my personal guess but, when we break down this special trial, we'd see that 80% of it was a defensive test that has to confirm whether there was a cooperative relationship within the class. And the remaining 20% suggests that it's a test of scouting against other classes and attacking them to interfere with their information-gathering ability.

However, this 8:2 proportion is not directly reflected in the trial's results. Or rather, I think it's only that 20% that greatly influenced the results.

We'd already grasped the plan of each class. On this topic, we decided what to do. Simply attack the other classes.

So, I'd start moving to the A class area. As D class moved around the riverside,

A class's center of activity was probably the cave area.

Katsuragi made no sense though. It's not like he'd been the first one to occupy the cave. The true attraction of the cave was not just that it's protected from natural elements. The place itself had a special meaning.

When I was wandering for a while through the forest, I could hear faintly the sound of waves. My pace got a little faster and I directly pushed through the trees to finally find myself on the coast.

"Oops....."

I applied a sudden brake in my steps and came to a stop. All because there was no foothold here and it was actually a cliff.

"I saw it from the ship, for sure..... it was under here."

Not far from the cave, very close to it actually, a multi-facility peeked out. Somehow, whether there was an alternative route or not and walking along the cliff, I noticed there was a ladder close to it, made in a blind spot where it was probable to miss it at first glance. I tried grasping the ladder in my hand with all my power, but it seemed so sturdy and strongly built that, in fact, I bumped into it.

Using the ladder from the bottom of the cliff.

If a person discovered it before landing on the island, he'd have to find his way to that place as soon as he landed.

Soon, I discovered a small hut. At the ingress of the hut, there was a device which was the clear evidence that this was a spot. Looking through the window, I could see some tools that were usually used for fishing. In other words, by taking control of this place, people could catch fish without any help from the school or without spending points for food.

And checking to see if there was a right of possession..... yeah, you could read the characters of A class here. Time left was about 4 hours.

There was no doubt that Katsuragi and others arrived here, after holding down the cave, and then they started taking possession.

This was a classic spot you didn't know it existed unless you discovered it

while being on board the ship.

Because this hut was directly below the cliff, you could see every moment of the occupation from the surroundings. You didn't even have to worry about anything.

There was no trace of indoor tools being touched. Dust was accumulating. I couldn't see any signs which indicated that this place was now occupied as a spot. I took out a map from my pocket and wrote down the location of the hut. Of course, it was only an approximate position. It would take a huge amount of time to measure it accurately.

When I finished marking, I folded the paper again and put it in my pocket.

Since there seemed to be nothing besides the hut, I used the ladder again to return to my original road.

"When we were turning around the island, I saw a tower over there....."

Relying on my memory, while I looked out over the area farther, I eyed the ground where I thought people had walked on. Then, as if to follow them, I proceeded towards the forest.

Eventually, I reached a place on higher ground, on a hill. Was this a spot too? If I climbed on the installed ladder, it seemed possible to overlook the shore but I thought that it wasn't all that much use as a facility. I wondered if there were things left that were not very useful in this spot too.

I got closer to find out that the equipment had been installed on the facility wall. Unlike the one before, the communication device here wasn't taken into possession by anyone and it was free. The fact that this kind of facility existed, was huge by itself. It was easy to find by a comparatively high number of students even though it was in the hinterland.

In brief, I didn't know who was keeping an eye on us, observing us wherever. Despite knowing that some spots had been discovered almost at the same time, the fact that tower was not occupied implied "the difference in the probability of being discovered by the enemy".

Katsuragi was a cautious man, a person who only used solid strategies. A man who never carelessly approached the closest sweet bait.

Suddenly, I realized that some bushes nearby were swaying despite the fact that there was no wind.

“I wonder if the reason for not occupying is not only a prudent one.”

“What are you doing here? This is the place that we A class use.”

Two boys showed up from the bushes as if they were waiting for their prey to fall into their trap. I was surrounded while I was leaving the place where the communication device was kept. Another one immediately went to check the state of the device.

“You... You are a face I haven’t seen around here.”

As a self-proclaimed pill bug that hid behind stones, like a social outcast as a member of D class, well, he might not know who I was.

The guy in front of me was holding a tree branch in my throat, as if he was seizing a weapon. Like he was threatening me, giving me a warning.

“I am Ayanokouji of D class.”

Of course, I gave my name frankly, as I surrendered to the threat immediately.

“Search him in case he is carrying anything suspicious.”

As if I was a suspect surrounded by policemen, they checked my pockets. They even checked if I had hidden something around my ankles or in my shoes.

“This is not an act of violence, you do get it, right?”

In times like this, there must be only one response. Just nod. As they searched my body, I was thinking that they could have found my pen and the piece of paper with the handwritten map. Both, in fact, were eventually discovered.

“Why do you have a pen?.... And a handwritten map?”

The rough map of the island that I had sketched along with the teams and occupation of places, everything that led to this place.

“Give it back.”

I reached out to take it, but they won’t hand it back obediently, so instead, I grasped the air.

"What are you aiming at? Do you act alone?

They were hitting me with questions, but I stayed silent. 3 seconds.... 4 seconds... I made a sound with my throat just to break the silence.

".... I can't tell you this."

"I see. That thing you cannot say, is it that there is someone pulling the threads behind? You people in D class, have you plotted a plan as a whole? Or is it a plan of a bunch of students from there?"

As if the police was interrogating a suspect, there was a rapid succession of quick questions.

"I cannot say. If I tell you then... I will not be able to return to my class."

"It is hard to be an underling, Ayanokouji. Oh well. I do not know what you were asked to do, but do not do any unnecessary actions. I want you to just sit quietly in base camp."

They threw the pen at my feet, while they kept the piece of paper with the map. These fellows might not have the right to order around, but their attitude was very oppressive.

"There is just one more thing that I would like to ask you. We are ready to deliver a generous reward if you speak of who is the leader that holds the keycard. A total sum of about 100,000... 200,000."

"Sell my class for money?"

"You are free to interpret our word however you wish. I will propose the same thing to other people, too. I am telling you that this deal is first-come-first-served so you'd better hurry to decide."

The strategy of A class had no risks basically. A simple method that could be materialised if there was abundant money. Although the probability was low, the possibility that some students would sell their friends, because they had their eyes set on money, couldn't be excluded.

"Thank you, but this is unbelievable for some reason. How and when will you hand the money? You do not even have a cell phone here."

"Certainly, it's impossible right now. We may sign a legal agreement if

necessary.”

In other words, first, we’d sign a contract and then they intended to transfer the money after the end of the exam.

“So, a written agreement? Let me ask you something, just for reference... Could you tell me how many points would I earn from this?”

“To a degree that is up to your ability.”

“Could the person who is in charge, here, explain it to me? Katsuragi for example, or maybe Sa...”

The moment I spoke the name, the expression of one of the boys changed drastically.

“Why are you bringing up the name of Katsuragi?”

“I heard some rumours that the representative of A class is Katsuragi.”

“Do not make me laugh. The leader of A class is Sakayanagi, not Katsuragi. You may go already.”

The students of A class opened the way as there wasn’t anything to do with me anymore and then disappeared. Apparently, these two were Katsuragi’s enemies. Then, were these guys working under Sakayanagi’s orders? Was Sakayanagi really the one who gave instructions around here?

This was something that I had to make clear.

Part 1

In order to check how C Class was doing, I looked around the base camp that was close to seashore. Until yesterday, this place was loud as if there was a festival going on but now it was just quiet with flies flying all around.

“Hey, you scared me, seriously. I thought you were strange but not to this extent.”

I was just vaguely looking around at the shore view when two people came out walking from behind me, pretending that they knew who I was.

“Did you come here to spy too, Ayanokouji?”

It was Ichinose and Kanzaki from B Class. I wondered if these two came to see

how C Class was doing.

"I'm in charge of finding food. I was just walking around in the forest and ended up here on the shore."

"Even though it's the middle of the day, it's dangerous to be out here doing this by yourself."

I nodded my head in agreement to Ichinose's kind warning. The two of them hid themselves in the shade and closely watched the movements of C Class.

This is because they had a good reason to be hiding.

"Woah, I can't see anybody. It must be just like Kanzaki said. They must be abstaining from any operations."

Ichinose scratched his cheek and let out a sad sigh.

"We were trying to see who C Class's leader was but... was this all for nothing? If they've all gone up to the boat then we won't be able to find any hints."

"I thought about it and don't you think C Class already used up all their points? If so then, even if we do find the leader, does that mean we won't get a penalty?"

"They said there would be no bad influences in Semester 2 so their points wouldn't go below 0."

Ichinose pursed his lips as if he was sort of bored. Since it was 3 o'clock, at the base camp of C Class that we had looked around, there was already nobody there and all we could see was an empty place. There were still students playing around in the water but that too, was due to the time.

"An operation that uses all of your points, it's not really something to compliment but even so it's really amazing."

"No matter how much I think about it, this just doesn't seem like it will work. This test is so you can gather points. By just throwing that whole idea away, Ryuuken has already lost."

Ichinose and Kanzaki, both with a pitiful look on their face, looked towards

the uninhabited island as they spoke.

"It's so hard trying to figure out who the leader is. It's really a waste of time, just a waste."

"I think quietly keeping watch and quietly taking part in the test would be the best option."

"Yes, yes. I think a solid strategy is the best thing we can use."

I don't know if those two were lying or telling the truth, but I could clearly hear their plan. Ichinose and Kanzaki realised that spying in C Class was meaningless and they focused their attention on the shore. Right now, it was the perfect opportunity.

I felt compelled to try asking Hiratana Kushida about Sakayanagi and since it's the two of them, they may know some details. Right now, the best thing would be to avoid doing anything that would make D Class notice me.

"I happened to hear this somewhere but... A Class's Katsuragi and Sakayanagi, do they each have their own opposing groups?"

"They don't get along, that is true. It seems they fought really hard. But... why are you asking?"

"Nothing. It's just that Horikita said if I had time to come and find out something about it. That there was a chance to really break down A Class down here but... even if they did fight that much, wouldn't they all come together for the sake of the test?"

"I feel the same but Sakayanagi is taking it easy in this test. It seems like Katsuragi is the only one putting in any effort. Because of that, don't you think all of them would be leaning towards Katsuragi? Am I wrong?"

Ichinose tilted his head and asked Kanzaki for his opinion. Who would've thought that Sakayanagi was an absentee.

"Katsuragi is one smart boy. Sakayanagi may be absent but the right-hand men won't defy him. I don't think they would do anything to like... deliberately cause a division between them though. To do that means you have no merit."

If this was all true, that meant that those two were doing exactly what Katsuragi told them to do.

"I see, I think that's true. But then, the students working with Sakayanagi, wouldn't they be really unhappy? Those two are complete opposites so it's clear their opinions would be opposites too."

"Complete opposites?"

"Reformists and conservatives? Offense and defense? One side assaulting and one side protecting? It feels like that's the complete opposite. Seeing it that way, if I think of A Class just going all out, that'd be scary. If they properly came together then, that would reveal their true side."

"I see. I will inform Horikita, later. Oh! Well. I think she would prefer to investigate it on our own again. What can I say? She works her men very hard, anyway. Oops... Pretend that you did not hear this last line. It's bothersome to be yelled at later."

"Ahaha.. I will keep it a secret. However, Horikita... Her viewpoints are very good. It seems that if those two people completely oppose each other, there will be retribution for sure, to the point that they may self destruct. But, there's not much that can be done at this stage, anyway."

Kanzaki confirmed the time on the wristwatch and began suggesting that he should go back to Ichinose.

"I must go. I should go back, look for food. They will be angry if I return empty-handed."

"Well then, let's be careful with each other's injuries and do our best. Please do not act rashly."

That's right, if I were to put it in Ichinose's words, I would say thank you for your petty tricks.

Chapter 5: Introduction - False Teamwork

When I was in deep sleep, I heard the girls' voices coming from outside, all in a bad mood.

"Hey boys, will you gather up?"

She didn't even finish talking that everyone got up promptly and came out in rage. I went to sleep at dawn so I woke up slowly while rubbing the sleep out of my drowsy eyes.

"What the hell... I'm so fucking tired."

An irritated Sudou came out from the tent looking at the others around him.

"What's wrong?"

"Uhm Hirata-kun... Sorry but can you wake up all the boys here? It's serious."

Shinohara notified Hirata looking apologetic. Whether she was confused or angry, Shinohara's appearance was not the problem regardless. A little far away, the girls were glowering at our side.

"Understood. I think they'll soon come out as I give them a shout."

Then, in a couple of minutes the boys came out of their tent rubbing their sleepy eyes. When they began looking at the girls gathered outside the tent, the half-asleep boys sensed an alarming situation.

The girls' eyes, that stared at us boys, were all unusually scared.

"What's wrong, so early in the morning?"

"Sorry Hirata-kun. It's something that doesn't concern you, Hirata-kun but.....We've gathered here because there's something I have to check at any cost."

Shinohara gave everyone, except Hirata, a look of contempt and then she spoke.

"This morning, well... Karuizawa-san's underwear was missing. Do you know

what that means?

“EH... UNDERWEAR?”

Even Hirata, who was always calm, appeared shaken and upset at the completely unexpected situation. Which reminded me, I couldn't see neither Karuizawa nor the other girls.

“Now Karuizawa-san is inside the tent, crying. Kushida-san and others are comforting her but...”

Saying so, Shinohara looked to the girls' tent.

“Eh? Ehhhhh? What, Why are you glaring at us knowing that the underwear is missing?”

“We decided that someone, in the middle of the night, went through the bag and stole it. The luggage had been put outside so if someone thought of stealing all of it, they could have done so after all.”

The boys, still dominated by drowsiness, looked at each other simultaneously.

“NONONONONONONO!? EH? EHH?”

Ike looked alternatively to the boys and girls in total panic. A boy, looking at the situation, coughed out in a calm voice.

“Come to think of it Ike, you yesterday... You went to the toilet quite late. You took a long time.”

“No no no! I was struggling because it was dark!”

“It's true. You're the one who stole Karuizawa's underwear.”

“Well, you're wrong! Don't do that!”

The boys begun putting the blame on each other for the nasty and offensive crime.

“Anyway. I guess this is really a big problem? But it's impossible to live camping in the same place as those underwear thieves.”

Shinohara, who looked like she was about to lose her temper, offered a monish with her arms crossed.

“So Hirata-kun. You can manage to find the culprit somehow, right?”

“That’s..... But there’s no evidence that the boys have stolen it. There’s a possibility that Karuizawa-san has lost it.”

“That’s right! We have nothing to do with this!!”

All the boys shouted at the top of their lungs from behind Hirata, proclaiming their innocence.

“I don’t want to think that there’s a culprit here.”

It seemed vile to doubt our classmates and not to shield them.

“I know that Hirata-kun is not the culprit... But, for the time being, let me check the other boys’ luggage.”

Apparently it seemed like the girls didn’t change their idea, and they perpetuated the idea of the culprit who is on the boys’ side. Well, it’s impossible not to think such a thing in this kind of context.

“EH? Stop saying bullshit. You don’t need to do such a thing. Hirata, just say no.”

“For now, we will gather and talk with all the boys. We may have a little time, right.”

“.....If you say so, Hirata-kun..... Ok I understand. I will talk to Karuizawa-san as well. But if the culprit can’t be found, we have an idea as well on who is on it.”

After saying this, the gathering dissolved. Hirata quickly gathered all the boys again to have a talk in front of the tent.

“Let’s just ignore what the girls said. You’ll feel bad if you’re suspected. I will fight!”

On the first day, I thought Ike obtained a certain degree of trust from the girls but it seems like it was pretension after all. It’s obvious that even the suspected boys will get uncomfortable if they are falsely suspected.

“Exactly. There’s no way that one of us has stolen Karuizawa’s underwear.”

Yamauchi, following the rest of the boys, looked at each of them. It’s not that

Karuizawa isn't pretty. But since Karuizawa is Hirata's girlfriend, it's more convenient for guys to chase after Kushida or Sakura.

"I'm not going to doubt you, guys. But I think this problem won't ever be resolved like this...."

The girls, who were talking and conspiring together over there, were now nearly jumping towards us.

"To prove your innocence, it's better for you to respond to your luggage inspection in a confident and dignified way."

Having said that, Hirata himself brought out his bag.

"As miserable as I am, I still responded to the girls' request, that's why you guys have to keep up by doing the same. Are we good?"

"B... But....."

"Of course, I can open it first."

To mobilize someone, although I thought we had no choice but to start acting by ourselves, there would be no one who thought that Hirata was actually the culprit, including boys, not just girls. To say that he stole his girlfriend's underwear, in the first place, is a bit of a contradiction. However, if the first one disclosed his luggage this way, we couldn't help but follow the example. It was inevitable that the students who didn't show the content of their bags were going to be suspected. Hirata's bag, naturally, was bound to not to have any underwear.

"There's no other choice..."

Influenced by Hirata's actions, all the boys began pulling out their bags from the tent, one after another.

Ike and Yamauchi have been disliking this the whole time but they couldn't go against the flow of things. Including me, us 3 became the last to go. So I guess I was finally going to the tent. I was following the other two.

"Shit, I'm mad. Men are suspected unconditionally and irrevocably. It's too unreasonable."

"Well, let's prove our innocence in a confident way and triumph over them."

Ike started to stand up while grabbing the bag but suddenly he stopped and stood still.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ahh, Nothing...”

Abruptly, he turned his back to Hirata and the others and sat down. Checking the inside of his bag, he closed the zipper like he was confused.

“Kanji?”

Ike was rigid with a pale face. He was unmoveable like he was having a temporary feeling of paralysis.

“Come on, let’s go?”

Yamauchi was watching Ike, whose appearance became suddenly strange, and he said half-jokingly:

“Maybe you stole it”

“What..?!! You’re... You’re wrong!”

Ike hastily denied it, shaking his head while holding the bag in his hands. What a blatant reaction. We haven’t become that dull as if we don’t have any emotions, after all.

“You... Don’t tell me...”

“What? Are you suspecting me?!”

“No, that’s not it... Just... The bag... Show me what’s inside.”

“Ah! Wait...”

Yamauchi grabbed the bag as he was really going to examine it. There it is...

White underwear that men absolutely do not wear. It was curled up and well hidden.

“Eh! That’s not mine! Somehow this was put in my bag!”

“Hey now, give me a better excuse.”

As Ike was in panic, Yamauchi’s look towards him was one of pity.

"I am telling you, I do not know! Seriously! Why there is... u... underwear in my bag?!"

"This is shameful. Anyway, let's explain the rest to Hirata and the others."

"Huh? If I do that, then it would mean that I confess that I am the culprit!"

"And the culprit was no one... Right?"

Yamauchi asked for his consent, but what does this mean? It is obvious that Karuizawa's underwear came out of Ike's bag. So, is Ike the culprit? The case is not that simple as to come to such an easy conclusion.

When and how did he steal the underwear? Also, I don't think that the thief would hide casually the underwear in his own bag. He should know that his act would soon cause an uproar and that we would start searching for the culprit as soon as possible. He sure failed to keep his composure. However, the moment we talked about opening his bag to search his belongings I thought he would panic. In Ike's case that didn't happen until after we found what we were searching for.

The conclusion drawn from this, is that the culprit is someone else and they put the underwear in Ike's bag.

Well, there was a small possibility that the thief was really Ike if only he wasn't so simple-minded and foolish. However... That's not true, is it?

"Hey, Ayanokouji, you do believe me right? Because I haven't stolen it."

"Judging from the situation, there is no concrete evidence that Ike is the culprit."

"Ayanokouji!"

"However, I cannot deny that there is a high possibility that he is the culprit. If he is the culprit though, then he is too stupid."

"Well, that's true... But... Then... What happened? You mean somebody put it in Kanji's bag?"

"That is what I must figure it out."

"Hey! Hurry up!" A boyish voice flew from Hirata's companions.

“Wh... Wh... What am I going to do? I am in serious trouble”

If the stolen thing was found here, no matter what the boys said, the girls would declare that Ike is the culprit.

“Anyway, we have no choice but to hide it. For now.”

“Hide it? Where? There is no place to hide it!”

It's true that given our situation, we couldn't hide it at the moment. If we went to the toilets or the tents, the girls watching over this place would be suspicious of our movements and maybe would demand to search us. Above all we are spending too much time here. We may already be suspected.

“No other way. Put it in your pocket.”

That was all the advice I could give him. There was no time to hide it in my underwear or my socks and we should draw no further attention to any suspicious activity.

“I... I can't do it... I am already in a panic.”

Still, I believed, now, we had no choice but to hide it.

“Then I'll leave it to you, Ayanokouji.”

Ike took out the curled up underwear from his bag and pressed it swiftly in my hands.

“What...?”

“If you think that it is better to hide it, then do it, right?”

“No!”

“Hurry up!”

“I am leaving, now.”

With an “I am leaving the rest to you” Ike tries to run away. Unwilling to be involved further, Yamauchi, too follows suit.

“Hey, hey! Are you serious...?”

I felt a little sweaty from the pressure. Nonetheless, until the end, the situation will only get worse. If I hid it, I'd want to make it difficult to find it, but

I don't have any spare time for this. Without having time to think, while holding my bag I squeezed it in my back pocket and headed towards Hirata's group.

"My bad, sorry. My bag got a bit dirty, so I was cleaning it with my hands."

By making this excuse, Ike handed over his bag.

"If you want to search it, then search it. Because I am innocent. Right? Yamauchi?"

"Oh! Yes!"

The two of them put down proudly their bags. Hirata at first declined the offer to do the inspection, but eventually he did it. I also put my bag down softly, and then I left the scene. After finishing inspecting everyone's belongings Ike called out to Shinohara who was waiting with her arms folded.

"We searched everyone. But we found nothing."

"Really?"

"Yup. We are sure now. None of the boys is the culprit."

"Wait a minute."

As Shinohara approached us, she began looking inside the tent. It looked like she was suspicious and thought we kept something hidden in here. But of course, nothing came out. After inspecting the two tents, Shinohara went back to the girls and whispered to them.

"You know, that Hirata. Maybe he hid it in his pocket or something? I am curious as Ike, Yamauchi and Ayanokouji were talking to each other in whispers."

Of course we were, after all the girls demanded to search all over the place carefully.

"That's enough!"

All the girls, including Shinohara began attacking Ike.

"Wasn't Ike acting suspicious from a little while ago? Maybe he is hiding something after all!"

"What!? I'm... I'm hiding nothing! If you want to search me, then search!"

Spreading his arms and pleading his innocence. Hey, now... If he keeps talking like that....

"Well, let's search. Hirata, could you do it please?"

"All right. However, you girls must understand one thing. If we find nothing here, then from now on I would like you to stop investigating the boys constantly."

This was the worst outcome. Under the supervision of the girls began a physical examination of Ike, Yamauchi and me. Of course the underwear won't be found on Ike and Yamauchi. They didn't move against Hirata's careful examination and he was able to inspect every corner. And finally my turn came. It was too late to escape from this. I guess it was me that put myself in this situation after all. I wish I could turn back and redo things.

No... Not really. There was no turning back now. So, I should bet on the possibility that Hirata might overlook even by 1%. I decided to stay still like a dead fish and be examined by Hirata as he was slowly checking my upper body.

And then, Hirata put his arm inside the back pocket where I put the underwear.

—— Has he finished?

Resignation started. Without a doubt, Hirata's arm was transmitting the sensation of feeling the underwear. Although I wasn't sure if that was really the underwear and not just the sensation, it was enough suspicious that a rolled-up piece of cloth was in the pocket. Hirata, whose body stiffed for a moment, looked into my eyes. But after our gaze entangled in a moment in which even one second didn't pass, Hirata, examining my jersey without taking the underwear out, turned his head to the girl.

"Ayanokouji doesn't have it either."

Saying this, he started walking towards Shinohara. Ike and Yamauchi surprisingly exchanged looks.

"These guys didn't have it."

"That's strange... I thought it would be someone from those three. But if

Hirata-kun says so..."

If Hirata who's overflown with sense of justice isn't telling a lie, Shinohara had no choice but to believe it.

"It should be fine once I tidy up the luggage. We can discuss if from then on."

After all the inspection ended, I hurriedly returned inside the tent. Soon after Hirata came along.

"Hirata... Why didn't you tell them?" I honestly asked.

"It is the underwear that you were having in your pocket, right?"

"Uh-huh."

"Karuizawa's underwear... Did you take them, Ayanokouji-kun?"

"No, that's wrong." How will this good young man take my short denial?

"I trust you. You're not that kind of person. But why having them in the pocket?"

There was no way I couldn't answer that after he told he believed me without hesitation. I told him honestly about them being in Ike's bag. Hirata showed his brooding gesture for a moment.

"Is that so? Then it wasn't you for sure. But I don't think Ike-kun and Yamauchi-kun did either. If it's a culprit in the first place I wonder if they couldn't put it in their own bag. I have a theory they hid it in another place."

Without telling some difficult explanation, Hirata saved me with his usual quick-wittedness.

"I can take care of the underwear, if you'd like."

"Sounds good... But is it okay?"

Having this is similar to holding the joker card – something that is hard to process.

"Even if I turn out to be the worst culprit, it will have minimal damage on me. They'll think I'm pretty much her boyfriend."

With saying this, Hirata put the underwear inside the plastic bag used for the

toilet. I wonder if Karuizawa would be happy knowing he touched her underwear with bare hands.

“However... With this we’ve found out one bad news. Knowing the underwear was in Ike-kun’s bag, high chances are there’s a culprit in the class.”

“I see...” No matter what, if other class’ students were wandering around then someone must have seen them for sure.

After leaving the tent, I looked around the surroundings. Our bags were wrapped in plastic one by one and put casually in front of the tent. A few meters away there was a tent where Karuizawa and the others were sleeping. Until the incident happened, the girls’ bags were piled up unprotectedly as well. You could easily steal something if you wanted to. I easily searched through Ibuki’s bag on the first day.

The question is – when it was stolen. It wasn’t for sure until we had a shower, so crime was conducted between yesterday around 8 PM until early morning around 7 AM. If that’s the case, anyone in the class could have done it. However, I didn’t think the crime happened in the middle of the night. Someone would have carried a flashlight in the pitch-black surroundings and would have been caught by its light if they had snooped around the bags. If so, the sunrise around 5 o’clock in the early morning was highly possible to be the time.

Well, even if we narrowed down the time of crime, it would be hard to narrow down the culprit from there.

What if... We change the perspective a little bit? The reason why Karuizawa would be the one stealing her underwear is to hide them inside Ike’s bag. But what did she want to achieve with that?

“I believe you’re not a culprit. That’s why I saved you.”

“O-oh. Thank you.”

“But that’s not all... I want you to find the culprit.” Hirata requested earnestly while taking my hand.

“Me, to find?”

"It will be uneasy if the culprit isn't found, boy or girl regardless. Truth to be told, it would be the best if I find them, but it looks difficult to devote time to put everyone together..."

Well, there are behavior restriction tagged along to the class' center person such as Hirata.

"Person involved in the crime is certainly worried about the culprit. I don't think a person who would do things like hiding the underwear in Ike's bag can be easily found."

Were we fully aware of that thing? Even Hirata was supposed to know that finding the culprit is hard.

"... Well, I'll do as much as I can for the time being. Don't have excessive expectations."

"Thank you! Thank you, Ayanokouji-kun!" While saying thanks with embracing spirit, Hirata deeply and thankfully lowered his head. It's not that I didn't understand Hirata's grateful feelings, but his response seemed a little over-excessive. The theft of this underwear was probably an extremely troublesome case to Hirata. It would be an evidence of him as a leader taking seriously a crisis that had come to the class in order.

"And then, if you find the culprit... At that time I want you to tell me first. Certainly don't tell it to anyone else."

His ability to convey strong emotions with appealing eyes is strongly assertive. It was eerie that they looked too dignified.

"If it becomes public, this class will again sustain a big damage. I want to avoid this. That's why I want to think of a method of getting a peaceful settlement through talking with the culprit. And if they reflect, we could be done with this story because of me."

"In other words, you'll hide the truth?"

"Hide, huh... It's a bad wording, but even if it's taken that way it cannot be helped. Even if someone from the guys is the culprit, I think the truth should be hidden."

He fixed his pupils on me intensively. It looks like he's saying he's willing to protect the perpetrator.

"I understand. So I'll report to you first. Is that alright?"

"Thank you. ...So, I'll go back to work."

Coming outside the tent, Hirata soon called out other students as if starting something. Multiple silhouettes I'd seen from the seat were becoming distant.

"Yousuke Hirata. Are you D class' hero?"

I felt one contradiction in Hirata's story. He said the truth should be hidden even if the perpetrator is a boy right after he said he saved me because he trusted me. In other words, even if someone had the underwear, the truth will be hidden from girls. Hirata didn't have full trust in me. Let alone that, he probably highly supposed there was a chance that I was the perpetrator. That's a natural thing, of course. From outsider's perspective I, who had the underwear, am saying that Ike is the culprit. That's why Hirata by giving me, who might be the culprit, the role of the detective spilt the thread of salvation and gave a warning not to cause second offence at the same time. While thinking this way, I could grasp the story. The only thing certain is to forget the incident.

I also had thoughts of Hirata being the culprit, but... Well, it would soon come to light.

Part 1

“Could you please gather the others?”

When I got out of the tent, Hirata’s meeting had already started to take place. It was not long before the whole class gathered together.

“Men are not to be trusted. It is absolutely impossible to stay in the same place with them!”

“But there seems to be a bit of a problem for guys and girl to live apart now, don’t you think?... The exam is almost over. Because we are friends, we must believe in each other and cooperate.”

“That may be right. But we cannot stay in a place with underwear thieves!”

Karuizawa is swinging her head to the side dismissing this idea as absolutely impossible.

Well, if the victim says so, then Hirata cannot say anything more.

Adding to this, Shinohara brings a branch of a tree and pulls out a line, in a patronizing manner.

“We believe that the culprit is a boy. So, we draw a line here and divide the area between girls and boys. Boys entering our area is absolutely prohibited.”

Shinohara finally proposed to officially divide our common living space.

“What’s this?! You treat us like criminals, without proper proof. Didn’t we let you check our baggage and also do a physical examination?”

“You may not have necessarily hidden it into your bag, right? Men are perverts. Anyway, please do not enter the girls’ territory until we find the culprit. So go over there.”

After saying that, they demanded the boys move the tents. As expected, the boys did not seem satisfied with this and booing ensued.

“If you do not believe us, then move your tent away or whatever. We will not move our tent and we will not help you move yours either.”

“Ah! I see, then fine. You cannot stand the burden of getting caught, while

pretending to help.”

“And do not use the shower anymore, ok? It is not a joke to let a man who might have been a perverted thief use it.”

It seems that the unity that we had so far has completely broken down.

“Heck. Can you even stamp your tent?”

Feeling that the situation became rather dangerous, Shinohara asked Hirata for help.

“Hey Hirata, could you please help us? For Karuizawa’s sake?”

“Ok, I’ll help you. It may take some time, is that okay?”

“Thank you, Hirata! Good for us, Karuizawa!”

“Yup. Only Hirata is to be trusted.”

Being a little bit happy and a little bit embarrassed, she made Karuizawa’s cheeks blush.

“Hmm... Although, Hirata could be the culprit.”

“What?! Hirata is not the culprit! What a stupid thing to say! Get lost!”

“Don’t make a fool of yourself Karuizawa. Just because he is your boyfriend does not mean that he cannot be the culprit!”

Naturally the boys’ complaints were rising, but in this situation their words weren’t taken into consideration. Everyone except Hirata was suspected to be the thief, so it couldn’t be helped. The discussion where Karuizawa and Shinohara seized the initiative was rapidly approaching the conclusion.

“Wait a minute. Can I raise my objection against all of you? Especially to you, Karuizawa?”

In the midst of such a cold atmosphere Horikita calmly but also firmly faced Karuizawa.

“What is it Horikita? Do you have any objections against our present plan?”

“I do not mind dividing the living area between men and women. As long as the culprit hasn’t been found, it is prudent to keep ourselves at a distance from

the boys, since there is a high possibility that the culprit is a guy. However, I do not trust Hirata, I mean I cannot rule out the possibility that he is the thief and I'm not convinced as to why he must be excluded from the rules and let him enter the girls' area."

"Hirata would never do such thing. Can you understand that, at least?"

"That's your own personal belief. Do not force the same idea on me as well."

Karuizawa was clearly not satisfied with Horikita's attitude and took a step closer to her.

"Hirata is definitely not the criminal. You don't even have friends, let alone a boyfriend, so you may not understand."

"Do not make me say the same thing over and over again. You cannot convince me about him." Horikita did not bend even when she was provoked.

"Well, then let me ask you something. I guess there are not any other boys that can be trusted except Hirata. Or are there?"

"I won't speak without thinking. Simply put, you can increase the number by another one. If you do that then we'll have two guys. It's very effective when guys want to watch each other's backs."

"This is not a joke! Did I steal your underwear? No! You've been humiliated by a guy. Do you even understand? Do you know what is going to happen if you pull the culprit in?"

"Don't you think this is happening because of your insufficient crisis management? While we were wasting time, maybe they were making up their reason of how they did not know the underwear were being stolen?"

"Oh! What crisis management?! They let us search their bags! What's insufficient in this!"

"It does not matter if your underwear is stolen. It happens often in everyday life, people fall victims of robbery. However, here it seems that there is a guy that has a grudge against you."

In other words Horikita considered the possibility that the culprit did not steal the underwear with an ulterior motive, but rather it was an act of randomness

against Karuizawa specifically.

Maybe there was someone who was trying to get rid of their old grudge against Karuizawa and who deliberately decided to humiliate her. I can imagine the culprit following such a route. But is it appropriate for Horikita to express that idea against Karuizawa in public? She is smart, but she has difficulty in interpersonal relationships and this is exactly Horikita's weak point. If Karuizawa is stirred up in front of a large crowd, then she will get even more hurt and irritated. And this rage will not only be headed towards the boys, but to Horikita too.

"You...."

Karuizawa was on the verge of bursting out with rage when Hirata barged in and stood beside her gallantly.

"Karuizawa. It would be of great help for me if you chose to save another boy. Can we do that?"

She followed up to his mediation.

"Bu.. But.. How can I trust anyone else apart from you, Hirata?"

"Well, then choose me!" Ike slowly raised his hand.

To think that he was fighting with Shinohara just a little while ago...

"Wait! If it's about physical work. It's me!" Sudou was waving his hand.

"Wait! It's me who has shown the most skillfulness, here!" Yamauchi also continued.

No matter how many times we had disputes with the girls, we couldn't help but wanting to be close to them.

"Stop joking! This is serious! We are not trying to find a way to bring a pervert here. It's no wonder that one of you is the thief. Or Horikita, do you think these guys are good enough?"

"Well, this is what I believe. These 3 people are completely unreliable, considering their daily behavior. So I thought this over carefully and I intend to choose the person who does not give me the impression of a thief."

"Who is it? Someone other than Hirata, then?"

I look towards the boys. Is there a guy who can feel at ease when compared to Hirata?

Who could it be?...

"It's you Ayanokouji!"

...What? Why me? How is it me?... Unintentionally, my mouth hung open, unable to speak a word.

"Hahaha! Do not make me laugh! If you think about it, isn't he the only friend you have? You can't trust such a quiet, sullen looking guy?"

Not that it matters to me, but my existence in this school seems to be something between "that guy" and "sulky fellow". Is this the pitiful fate of a man who could not build satisfactory interpersonal relationships in the first semester?

"I think that Ayanokouji could be the culprit. In the morning he was acting a bit weird sneaking around, wasn't he?"

When I found the stolen underwear in Ike's bag, I had no choice but to talk nonsense in order to get out of this situation. Well, it is a fact that I had Karuizawa's underwear in my hands at that time, which made me look rather suspicious.

"It might be possible... Certainly, he was in front of the bonfire yesterday until late night, Ayanokouji-kun..."

It seemed like the girls' scepticism had become evident when they chose me as their next target. Suspicious persons began to pop out among the boys. Ike and Yamauchi were in complete ignorance. Regardless of us being silent or clarifying things out, we stayed silent since it was a disadvantageable situation. No matter how much the girls doubted, Hirata was holding the evidence and it wasn't ruled out that we could turn to be the culprit against our will.

However, to be suspected as a culprit wasn't a good feeling, regardless of false accusation.

"Ayanokouji-kun really is the underwear thief, right? He makes no excuses. He

fixedly stared at Karuizawa-san with an eye of a pervert before.”

A suspicious voice could be heard among the girls. I couldn’t recall looking at her in such a manner, but what can you do if my brain decided to forget it for my convenience. False accusations happen in such a way.

“Um... Ah, I think Ayanokouji-kun doesn’t do such things...”

Because all the girls showed doubt with all their might, I thought no one would take my side, but words of protection came from unexpected person. Arching her back from behind, Sakura defended me in a hesitant way. I didn’t expect such an action from a girl who’s bad at getting attention from others more than anyone.

“Huh? What are you saying, why would you say such a thing?” Karuizawa turned her head in a displeasure to Sakura, who was siding with a potential culprit. From the viewpoint of a girl full of high spirits, timid Sakura is a reasonable target. It’s easier to confront her than Horikita. She changed her prey in an instant and as in predation attacked with words:

“Huh, why? How do you get that Ayanokouji isn’t the culprit?”

“That’s... That... It’s because he isn’t a person who... would do that...”

Being strongly pushed, she desperately squeezed out her voice in fear.

“Huh? I don’t get it. That isn’t an answer.” After folding her hands, Karuizawa laughed ruthlessly at Sakura’s continuous mysterious support.

“Eh? Does Sakura-san like plain, ordinary Ayanokouji-kun maybe?”

Rather than just making fun of her, Karuizawa said this with proper reason. It would be fine if such a statement without basis was turned aside without hesitation, but Sakura took it straightforwardly.

“N-no!?”

Startled in surprise, Sakura’s cheeks turned red and became restless.

“Wow. What’s this elementary-schooler like blunt response. It’s so obvious.”

The other girls joined Karuizawa in laughter.

“That’s...! Ah, um... Uuum...!”

"Ha, isn't it good? There is no other person who likes him that much. What can you tell us here? Hey hey, I can even help you out."

"Uh!!"

As if she couldn't handle the atmosphere of having too many eyes on her, Sakura ran off into the woods. Kushida left us behind running after her. She had a good observation that being alone in the woods might be dangerous.

"What was that? I was just teasing her a bit. That's why she can't make any friends."

Watching over Karuizawa's public execution from beginning until the end without saying anything, Horikita let a sigh while combing her hair as if she was watching something uninteresting.

"I wonder if it's okay to continue with the discussion soon. It's a waste of time to watch charade after all."

"You know, Horikita-san. Such speech comes off as if you're being annoyed."

As if losing interest in runaway Sakura, Karuizawa once again targeted Horikita.

"Hey, Horikita-san. Why do you treat me coldly? Did something happen?"

"Something? There is something."

"Well, isn't Hirata-kun cool? He's also smart. And he's even nice to someone like you, I think every ordinary girl falls for him."

While giggling, Karuizawa took Hirata's arm and pulled him with pride.

"I'll tell you, Ayanokouji-kun is... Well. His physical appearance is good compared to the other guys, but isn't everything else awful? I was wondering if you're jealous of me. These are my thoughts."

"You're very naïve, Karuizawa-san."

"Aah— So bad, it's shameful to be jealous!"

I often hear that collective behavior carves a person's role, personality and psychological state. Things that could not be seen in school life seemed to come to the surface one after another. Especially for Horikita who was always by

herself, being picked by the girls in her class awfully bad, and yet she would let things go past as something out of her concern. Since this was a community life, both parties couldn't help but be affected inevitably.

"Surely Ayanokouji-kun have many parts that aren't being praised."

Oi... I thought she would back me up, but it was the opposite.

"However, can Hirata-kun trust him is another question. It was essential for you to pressure Hirata-kun without reason. In reality, there is no factor to trust Ayanokouji. Besides, I'm absolutely not going to get across personal affection. As a result of extinguished past, he became the guy you can trust the most in the class. Or is there a guy you can say is better than him? If there is I want you to tell me."

Saying this, Karuizawa glanced at boys in evaluation and let a sigh.

"... Well it looks there's no one significant among guys. They're always in the background."

I had no choice but to agree with that point. The girls' perception is too harsh.

"Oh well, isn't that great? I have doubts, however. I'll put up with it if Hirata-kun is okay."

It looked like I was the one chosen from Karuizawa and the girls in the end, but I wasn't satisfied. Of course, I didn't reveal such a thing. There would only be another dispute.

As the talk was coming to an end, dispersement began and simultaneously with it the class' solidarity collapsed.

"I understand what everyone wants to say, but... I disagree with suspecting a classmate without basis. There is no person in our class who would do awful things." Said Hirata as he couldn't stay silent about this deterioration.

"You're too kind. Are you saying someone else stole it?"

"I don't know that... But, I don't want to suspect a classmate."

The guys as well were thinking of the culprit feeling bad about being suspected by the girls all the time.

"Hey... Maybe —— Is it Ibuki?"

One person murmured while secretly looking at Ibuki who sat at the end of the campbase.

In that moment, a spearhead of doubt turned toward Ibuki as if a group set an eye on one prey.

"Ibuki-chan from C class, right. It wouldn't be ridiculous if she pretends to be D class' hindrance... Using tricks to make us look suspicious."

"Stop with the nonsense, guys. You are without a doubt the most suspicious."

Shinohara is very suspicious of the boys. She was keeping her distance from the boys, gesturing with her hand for them to back off.

"Until we figured out who's the culprit, we surely can't trust guys. Right, Karuizawa-san."

"Right. The culprit is surely someone from the guys."

Because of this incident, it had been decided to continue with our activities with the guys and girls being separated individually in the end.

Part 2

I will repeat myself over and over again, but a guy named Yousuke Hirata was a cool guy. Not because of his outstanding looks, but because of his ideals of how actions ought to be. An ordinary human being takes the initiative to be responsible for troublesome, unpleasant matters while responding uppermost to the others. Cooperating with the girls, he was setting up 2 tents to keep them at a distance from the boys.

I, who was on the other side, had a fixed role of hammering pegs of carrying tents to the ground. At the beginning I immediately struggled to be completely omitted, but as soon as I got the hang of it, I had a fixed position in the first tent. It was unexpectedly easy. Right now I was nailing the peg of the second tent with a hammer while wiping my sweat. Our link Hirata assisted me with spreading the rope and hammering the peg.

“Sorry for giving you a hard time.”

The other boys were playing outside or trying to store some food with fishing.

“Oh – no, you don’t have to apologize. It would be bad leaving it to you.”

“It’s not bad. I’m doing it as much as I like.”

The existence of his refreshing smile was a big factor in the coolness of this guy.

“It might come off as weird, but why are you working so hard?”

“Working hard? I don’t tend to work hard. I’m only doing what has to be done.”

Without meaning to sound boastful, he wiped dripping sweat with a towel that was hanging on his neck.

“I think this special trial isn’t a battle, but an important opportunity for everyone to become closer. That’s why I want to cherish this very moment. I will gladly work if that’s necessary for it.”

I wonder if an ordinary person can be full of good intentions as much as

Hirata without being two-faced. Wanting to be liked by people, wanting to attract attention – it's normal to have such a mindset. But I couldn't get such an impression from Hirata. I had strong feelings that he just wanted to be good to everyone.

"Alright, about half is left. Let's end this quickly."

The two of us went to the opposite side of the tent in order to hammer the remaining pegs.

"Hirata-kuun! Come here for a moment!" Karuizawa and the other girls were calling Hirata. In a flash they surrounded Hirata and were pulling his arms forcefully.

"C'mon, c'mon, come here!"

"Ah, I still have things to do..."

"Can't you leave it to Ayanokouji-kun? Can't you?" They said while pulling him with all strength.

Looking at Hirata and his worried face, I answered while thinking they're a bother: "... I'll do this, go."

"But, it's hard to do it alone ——"

"It's alright, only a few things left."

"So-sorry. Thank you. I'll be right back."

It was rather an imprudent request that seemed profitable to the girls, but as if my words didn't reach them, they continued pulling him in the direction of the woods. Maybe they'll come back soon.

I took the hammer once again, as I was dejectedly watching Hirata leaving the flag behind. I continued with the work and finally completed everything by myself before Hirata returned.

"It took me more time than I thought, being alone..."

I had to pay attention to the direction of the tent and pegs while stretching the rope many times.

It was after 10 o'clock. What should I do now?

I couldn't make a mistake in the process now when it started moving.

But before that I restored my physical strength. Working under the blazing sun was too exhausting.

"May I have a word with you?"

Since I completed the first stage I thought I'd rest for a while when Ibuki called.

"The discussion about the underwear thief this morning looked very serious. I mean, D class isn't monolithic."

"Hmm, could be. We can't stand various hardships."

"Whatever the reason, as a woman stealing the girls' underwear is unforgivable."

That's right. But why was she telling me this? It wasn't me who was protecting Ibuki but Yamauchi as he was looking after Kushida's group. Since we had a discussion there shouldn't be any special entwined concern...

"Are you doubting me?"

It looked like Ibuki saw my treatment of being a culprit from Shinohara and the others this morning from far away as well.

"Are you the culprit?"

"No, that's not the case."

"Then it's fine. Well, it's not like I have specific proof. It looked like some girls trust you and that boy Hirata. I think the chance of you being the culprit is low."

She had such a conclusion after hearing the argument between Karuizawa and Horikita.

"You have no clue about the culprit?"

"Right now, not at all. I don't want to doubt the guys as much as possible."

"So, who do you think is the culprit?"

Her inquiry was as if she was testing me. I was side glancing Ibuki who was standing right beside me, but she was waiting for the response without facing

me. Even so, she continued without an answer:

“If the guys aren’t the culprit as you’re saying, then the next one who is suspicious is me, a stranger. Someone is certainly doubting me. I might be pretending as if the guys have stolen the underwear. Am I right?”

She said so in self-mockery as if being fully aware that she herself is a suspect. I replied to her in a moment full of feelings:

“I wonder if you at least trust me. I don’t think you’re the culprit.”

I answered this to Ibuki without hesitation. She looked at me a bit surprised as if wanting to make sure that this is true. When my eyes matched hers, she looked away.

“... Thank you. I didn’t think you’d be so kind.”

“It’s just an honest answer.”

The reason I could answer so honestly is because I trusted her only by looking at her sincere eyes.

Therefore, I thoughtlessly made a conclusion. The culprit who stole the underwear from Karuizawa and hid them in Ike’s bag was Ibuki.

Part 3

So, on the 5th night of the special examination trial, D class was feeling depressed. It was like we were keeping vigil all night over a dead body. After all, no one knew who the culprit was and no one wanted to talk about it. A whole day passed without a moment of doubts and suspicions.

Within this situation, today, I was responsible for keeping the fire burning. I was just looking at the fire, throwing some branches occasionally... a very monotonous and easy task.

The problem, though, laid elsewhere.

“Hey, Ayanokouji! I told you to move the tent properly, didn’t I?”

“Move it more to the left. Because it’s too close to the boys.”

“... All right.”

They just gave me an unreasonable order and I accepted it reluctantly. The girls left with indignation.

“It’s hard when you are forced to do miscellaneous routine duties.”

“... Look who’s talking. I would have been alright if it wasn’t for your unnecessary recommendation.”

“There was no other way. Hirata is not to be trusted. Insurance is necessary.”

“You are the only one in class who doesn’t trust Hirata. It’s better not to think that all people live by being two-faced.”

“That’s true. In fact, I am not two-faced.”

Indeed. Horikita lives, by being true to herself.

She ended up dodging this rather skilfully.

“However, most people use their real intentions quite differently from their principles. Just like you do. Moreover, I don’t trust any of them because charity and hypocrisy are two sides of the same coin.”

It seemed that her trust issues weren’t limited only to Hirata. They applied to

Kushida as well.

“Still, I trust Hirata very much.”

“Ah! At least, I can count on you. You are really reliable.”

“Rely on me? Can you at least say that I have a good influence on the class because of him?”

Horikita must have had something on her mind since she came back at me with a counterattack. It probably seemed to her that I was holding information that she didn't know and, on top of that, I kept answering her with an unfriendly smile.

“Well, Hirata is not perfect. There are times that we cannot organise things properly when boys and girls are gathering together. But don't you think he is doing his best as a coordinator? He can do what other students can't.”

“That's for sure. It's true that his act of taking on a big role without making a sour face is impressive, but this must come together with a good result. However, it's not possible anymore. The situation looks dire already. Do you know that the points that we D Class own now are very few?”

“It seems that there was an excessive amount of spending. I can't estimate exactly.”

“Just as I thought — Hirata, whom you trust so much, keeps his lips sealed.”

“What do you mean?”

“Please, follow me.”

I wonder what it is that I should see so much that we left the fire unattended.

Where are we going?

In front of the girls' tents.

Horikita opened the cloth on the main panel and showed the inside of the tent.

“That's...”

Unlike the empty boys' tent, the girls' tent had a completely different view because there was no space to sleep.

On the floor, there was a floor mat to soften the hardness of the ground, and several pillows seemed to have been inflated with air. Furthermore, they installed a battery-powered cordless electric fan.

"The exact same things are also placed on the other tent too. A total of 12 points."

"I used to think that the girls endured the heat with patience and without complaints. So, this is how you do it."

It's not like they were patient from the beginning. They just purchased all the necessary items.

"Karuizawa and the others applied for these."

It seemed that they indulged themselves quite well in the shadows.

"When I realized it, it was only after they had placed the order and everything was ready. It's difficult to do anything when we made a rule that anyone can use points if they apply for it."

Just like with the case of Kouenji that withdrew early from the exams, there was no way to stop using points.

"It seems that Karuizawa reported this to Hirata, so he definitely knows. But you didn't know it. It's a fact that no one told you or informed the others. However, I think that this kind of information must absolutely be shared with everyone else."

Horikita explained the situation with her arms folded. Her words made sense, but it didn't seem that Hirata kept his mouth shut because he actually had malicious intentions. Maybe, he just wanted to avoid unnecessary confusion.

Even Karuizawa was evaluated when she reported to Hirata.

"I understand what you mean, but I don't have anything in particular to say. Points that have been used cannot be returned, and there aren't many days left for the test to end. So, Karuizawa probably won't use any more points carelessly."

I thought I was getting angry with the cold way she responded back but it seemed like this was an already expected reply from Horikita. So I ignored her

completely.

"If nothing continues to happen, this time we should probably remain quiet and obedient. But it's very risky that the stolen underwear case remains unresolved. If the culprit is still nearby, from now on we should probably hold him back from achieving other successes. That's why I want to catch the culprit as soon as possible."

"So, do you want me to collaborate with you?"

"Yeah. Now that cracks started to appear on the male side, there are many things which I can't do alone."

Boys and girls were now in the middle of a cold war. Information from both parts had been cut off and it was hard to find them out even if we went out to explore.

"Understood. I don't know if it'll help but I'll cooperate."

When I replied so frankly, on the contrary, Horikita had a doubtful face.

"...I can understand things a bit.... Do you have any other aim?"

"It's better for you to accept other people's favours amenably. As a man, I'm quite dissatisfied with the fact that other men have been treated like thieves. My motive to collaborate is enough."

Earlier before, Hirata asked me to be responsible for the situation but it shouldn't change anything.

"Well, let it go. It's settled then."

But the culprit wasn't stupid. First of all, under the situation of being suspected by all the members of the class, he wouldn't give himself away or show his true colours. Horikita may still think it'll all be okay even in the worst situations. When we've already been disturbed on this trial more than this, it had an effect on the points too.

However, about the culprit.... Ibuki will probably have to take action once again. No, it has to happen for sure. Because she didn't achieve her goal yet.

"Such a serious face. Treating someone like a criminal like that is not to your liking?"

“Because of this incident, the class is a mess. It’s a pity, despite the fact that we did everything very skillfully until today.”

“It’s unexpected that we managed to cooperate until now. Because usually there’s no teamwork in D class. The final effect has been poor though, especially now that there’s a crack in between the boys’ side and the girls’ side. Of course, it would have been better to bring everything until the end of the exam”

“Besides, whoever is the culprit, I wonder what is really his aim. Was the purpose of stealing Karuizawa’s underwear just putting into disorder our teamwork? I feel there’s another hidden purpose.”

At the keyword “purpose”, Horikita crossed her arms but, after considering it for a while, she shook her head.

“Let’s not think too much...Sorry, but I’m going back to the tent.”

Horikita, while breathing bit by bit, brushed her hair up and turned her face away from me.

“Hey Horikita, how about confessing quietly?”

“Confessing? What in the world are you saying?”

Although she pretended to be calm, Horikita had a slight perspiration on her forehead. I decided to be reasonable with her.

“From when the exam started, you’ve become increasingly sick.”

There may have been signs of her poor physical condition even before travelling but it was still light. Due to Horikita’s personality, the possibility that she would have been absent in a travel where there was excessive playing around was very high.

“It’s normal.”

“You’re lying.”

I caught Horikita in the lie she continued to tell and then I extended the hand towards her forehead. As expected, when I came in contact with her forehead, it felt hot. She tried to escape but her movements were really slow.

"Since when.....did you notice it?"

"That time when we met on the deck. I wanted to hear what were you doing at that time."

"Yes. I told you I was reading a book in my room."

"It was really tough on you so you stayed in your room sleeping, right?

"What's the basis of that?"

"When you joined the others, your forelocks were disheveled. In other words, that was the evidence you were laying down just before. Moreover, on the anchor deck, it was so damn hot but it seemed like you were cold. Even now, you're wearing long sleeves with the zipper raised to the top. If you observe your situation until today from an external point of view, even elementary students will understand where my conclusion came from."

Horikita, who usually would strike back, this time lost the words to retort back and sunk into silence for a while.

"If you could offer all that sharpness towards A class, you'd be able to get a little more recognition."

"No. There's no turning back. Are you not going to keep silent about my condition anymore?"

Touching with my hand, it was clear that there was a flu close to 38 degrees. Still, she was hiding it. That was for some simple reasons. If you reported your bad physical condition, the class would end up receiving a bad evaluation and getting a bigger penalty. Her luck ran out since the exam started.

"Be patient for another 5 days, it'll all be in vain if you give up here. Good night."

She's going to survive until the end. Her will seems to be solid.

Part 4

I felt a strange warmth and stiffness on my cheek.

Having a bad feeling about this warmth already, I tried to move away by stretching my neck a little. However, I could not move. I felt something like an arm being fixed tightly around my neck.

“W... What?...”

Waking up with a sense of discomfort. I immediately realised that I was in a scary situation. Sudou was sleeping across my face, with both his legs around my thighs.

“Suzune... I...cannot hold it, anymore...”

“Arghhh”

I screamed, startling even myself and I escaped from Sudou’s headlock.

“Shut up... What is it Ayanokouji?... Don’t wake me up... Hmph”

He was trying to force something terrifying upon me, this fellow

Even if I think that I was mistaken as someone else. Still, this is not a thing to reveal in a crowd of men in the middle of the night.

The time on the wristwatch was still before 6 in the morning, but as soon as I felt the hot, humid air, my drowsiness vanished in an instant.

I exit the tent in order to get out of the steamed atmosphere. The moment I step outside, I realize that the scenery is completely different from yesterday.

“... Just my luck, isn’t it?”

It seemed that the curtain on the 6th

day of the special examination test opened, early in the morning with trouble.

There are signs that it will begin to rain soon. Most probably around noon.

The weather was rough, towards the end of the exam.

There is no need to worry if it rains a little bit, but in some cases it rains

heavily and strong winds are possible.

Then, we may have to act thinking the worst case scenario.

It seems that we will have a lot to do. Like checking the tent pegs and thinking what to do with the baggage.

In other words, that means that we are going to be busy and that will cause unnecessary attention.

Eventually, when everyone gets up, we will

combine the food we gathered with the emergency food we've got in store, by using our points and make it into a pot, so we can eat.

In our everyday life here, there are naturally complaints here and there that gradually increase, but in the last couple of days, everyone showed their willingness to survive this test.

"Excellent. We have no incident, for days."

Surely. This would not have been the case if there had been an incident today where underwear was stolen.

Now, In front of the boys' tent, the guys who were guarding up until the morning were passed out like being drunk.

This is a deterrent that was devised to prevent the recurrence of underwear theft.

Hirata was gathering already a lot of students and giving them a final round of encouragement.

We should split into groups and start searching for food in order to survive today.

Once we get the food of the day. We don't have to use points.

It can be said that this is a critical moment.

We, too gather around Hirata

"Shouldn't we also come with you?"

Already standing on the riverbank with the fishing rod in one hand, Ike turned

over his shoulder to ask.

"No. Ike and Sudou, I want you next to go fishing. From now on try to teach instructions about fishing to the other students. We have no time."

As soon as the policy is decided, Hirata goes and gathers the group as many raise their hands.

Of course, I will not be able to raise my hand, but I will participate as a remainder this time.

The members chosen are Horikita, Sakura, Yamauchi and surprisingly, Kushida.

Horikita's physical condition seems to be still bad, but she is struggling to look well so as her situation is not to be perceived by the people around.

"How did this happen and you are left behind? Where is your usual group of friends?"

Come to think of it, I can't see any of the girls who were working with Kushida in this exam.

"Ah, yes. Well..."

Kushida whispered in Horikita's ear, as if he was worried about the boys' presence.

"The truth is, Mi-chan today is a girl's day, right? ... You look pretty sluggish, too and you look sick all the time. So, my other friends may attend you at the tent"

Standing close to Horikita and Kushida, I heard their conversation.

"I am safe from the effects of the menstrual phenomenon even if you say that I seem to be in a poor physical condition. It's only natural, after all. But why bother with this group? I am sure there are many other options"

The only reason why Horikita goes on a fool's errand is because she hates Kushida.

Basically, Horikita hates humans in general, but among them, it is Kushida the one that she particularly dislikes the most.

Why does she hate her so much?. The reason for this seems to be simple, it is because Kushida seems to hate Horikita, too.

However, whenever I think about the relationship between these two, I feel like there has always been a strange sense of discomfort between them.

Kushida Kikyou has a hidden side, especially towards girls. There is one side of her that changes suddenly so as to abuse a person calmly.

However, this is a fact that I happened to know by chance, and the usual Kushida is basically a bright and caring cute girl who is kind to everyone.

I don't think there are any students who dislike her except for reasons such as jealousy, but I think I understand well that Horikita is not the kind of person who would be jealous of Kushida's character.

There are some things that make even the philosophers suffer.

Such as the question "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg".

A chicken is a creature born literally from an egg, but also a creature that lays eggs. So which came first, the egg or the chicken? That kind of story.

So, I do not know which one between these two was the first to dislike the other, Horikita or Kushida, or when did this started.

"I thought that it would be good to talk to you Horikita, since a lot has happened. You know, we haven't talked that much during this trip. As soon as it gets dark, let's go to sleep, together"

Kushida understands that she is hated and tries to make friends with her even though she hates her, too. Well, if her goal is to be friends with all her classmates, being friends with Horikita is a road that cannot be avoided.

There are a lot of complicated and confusing questions about the relationship between these two.

"I do not have free time to accompany you for unnecessary things"

"You are so mean Horikita. Even though your sleeping face is so cute"

Horikita seemed a little annoyed, as Kushida said those things to make fun of her.

For the time being, though, it seems that I will search for food with these members.

"Hey, Ibuki, why don't you come with us, too?"

Just as we are ready to go, I call Ibuki who is resting under the shade of a tree.

"I..."

"Today is the last exam. I don't want to pressure you if you don't want"

"You're right. Since I have a debt of gratitude with D class, I'll help....Ok, I'll take part in it"

Ibuki, who put her bag on her shoulder, wished to participate and Yamauchi was pleased by it.

"Ah, that's good, that's good! This feels like a harem though"

The more the girls' percentage increased, the more Yamauchi's tension increased too. But there was nothing better than having a lot of hands. With no reason to refuse, Horikita set foot into the forest without replying anything in particular.

"The dark forest is really ominous....or rather I should say are you afraid of the heat and the fact that it's damp and humid"

The sky was actually pretty cloudy, and the inside of the forest changed considerably compared to yesterday. The visibility was scarce. Yamauchi, who was sweating from his armpits, proceeded to fan his own gym tracksuit with low spirit.

"Aren't you hot, Sakura?"

Yamauchi, who wanted to talk about something, called out to Sakura. But, his eyes were fully concentrated on her breasts, and it was easy to understand that his only aim was that he wanted to see directly her tits.

"Eh? Ah, Ahhh, no. It's okay"

All of sudden, Sakura tried to lean back like she wanted to indirectly escape his gaze. It is said that girls are really sensitive to men's gaze because there's always an ulterior motive to it. In Sakura's case, this is particularly noticeable,

since she already had many experience like this.

“Yesterday, Karuizawa was really terrible. You’re so gentle, Sakura, so Ayanokoji decided to protect you”

“Ah, yeah.....”

He had all the intentions of talking warmly but his gaze and the substance of it is a high-explosive bomb.

“Yamauchi. You might as well be mindful of the trees. It’s possible that they may bear fruits. Also, in this area the trees are tall, so please hold on tight too ”

“Oh, ohh. Of course”

Doing this, I’ll somewhat be able to prevent that Yamauchi’s gaze will turn again towards Sakura. Nevertheless, the boundless lust of a man will never run out.

“Rain clouds are approaching from south-west. The weather may be stormy sooner than we imagined”

Depending on the circumstances, it would be better to keep in mind that the rain will probably fall first thing in the afternoon. If this happens, it may be dangerous to go out looking for food for a long time. If we end up being caught up in the rain in the forest, far from being forced to a standstill, there’s the fear of injuries. In this case, a large quantity of points will be spewed out all at once.

“Mmm....”

While we kept walking quietly looking for food, Kushida repeatedly assumed a brooding and pondering expression while looking alternately between me and Horikita. Of course, Horikita was ignoring everything.

“What’s wrong Kushida-chan”

Yamauchi asked her, when he noticed her delayed actions.

“Ayanokoji-kun and Horikita-san are on good terms from the beginning, right? So, I was thinking about the reason”

“It looks like this. Why are you that close?”

Kushida opened a difficult topic as well.

“We don’t really get along well though”

“You always deny it but, you still get along. Even now you’re always walking next to each other”

Even if they say such a thing, I’m not really aware of it nor I particularly remember doing it.

“Ah. I may have found something that Ayanokoji-kun and Horikita-san have in common”

“What is the common point?

“Well, look at them properly Yamauchi-kun. Do you notice anything?”

“What?”

Yamauchi drew near and observed my face centimeter by centimeter. Then, after that, he rushed to Horikita and took a closer look to her face. Ah, so stupid. He got too close.

Slap

And so she struck his face in the most dry way. It’s just exploded a splendid slap in the face from an ashamed drama actress. Yamauchi started to hop up and down in a weird dance, first soundless from the vigor and the pain of the slap, then shouting and falling down. What is terrible is that Horikita doesn’t even glance to Yamauchi nor she cared about his words.

“What, what did you do?”

“You were too close. You better remember to keep away from my personal space”

It was something similar to what happened when Ike came out and made a pass at Horikita. I think everyone would feel uncomfortable when coming face to face, and at a really short distance, with a boy you don’t like to begin with.

“Ahahah....So..Sorry Yamauchi-kun. I said some unnecessary things. You okay?”

“You, you’re kind Kushida....”

Yamauchi took the hand that Kushida held out, and he stood up with a red

face. Ibuki kept watching the whole story from beginning to end with a slight surprised face. She probably doesn't see often this kind of stupid exchange in C class.

"Wha, What is the common feature that you noticed, Kushida?"

"You know? They both laugh very little! I mean, I think I never saw Ayanokoji-kun and Horikita-san smiling"

Kushida pointed out this unexpectedly, and she was convinced I would accept it obediently. Regarding Horikita. I saw her smiling several times like she wanted to fool the other party but that was nothing more than a smile of courtesy.

"I've never seen Horikita's smiling face. But I smile, right?"

"I've seen your bitter smile but...I've never seen you smiling from the bottom of your heart or roaring with laughter. Or you just didn't show it to me?"

I glanced to her a little displeased. Yes, this time my heart beat fast too. My pulse suddenly raced/increased.

While we're still on this desert island, a lovely scent tickled my nose. I got embarrassed and I averted my eyes.

"It seems like it's all genetic. The difference between a person who laugh often and a person who doesn't"

"Uhm...I don't like this kind of reason. Even if it's true"

Well, that's not all. There's also the possibility that the environment, in which one is mainly brought up, influenced this kind of thing.

"Should we try practicing once? How about that? Smile"

"For the time being, let's start with the center of this area"

Said Horikita.

"Eh? Laughing practice?"

"How long do you feel like travelling? We decided already that we need to find food"

Horikita put Kushida in her place with a strong tone and a flat refusal. And immediately she fired instructions to deploy the people for the search.

“Two persons should search without acting alone. Beware of that. Let’s go Ayanokouji-kun.”

Being called, I started walking with Horikita.

“A... Au...”

Huh? I saw Sakura who was following us from behind dropping her shoulders.

“Let’s find food together Sakura.”

Yamauchi, who called behind Sakura’s back, suddenly showed me thumbs up. It seemed that was the sign of using the chance of only two of us being together.

“Take care, Ibuki-san.”

Ibuki and Kushida who stayed paired up. Ibuki is unsocial as well but there shouldn’t be problem being with Kushida.

“Horikita, how will you handle the custom key card?”

“I check it on the sixth day of the trial, right... I always have it on me.”

Saying this, she put her hands in the pocket of her jacket letting me know it’s right there.

“When I improve the device, I’ll slip it among the students arranged by Hirata-kun. Ibuki and the others aren’t supposed to know.”

Well, I wasn’t worried much concerning the circumstances. Since it was the thing I had to pay the most attention to I’ll do it well.

“Could you show it to me?”

“Huh? Here?”

“It’s rather convenient here. It’s too suspicious in the basecamp.”

“... That’s true, but what will you do when you see the card?”

I explained the situation to Horikita who was giving me suspicious look.

“To be honest, I was being silent until now. Since I was together with Sakura she can confirm it later, but I saw students having some kind of keycard on the first day.”

I told Horikita about Katsuragi obtaining the card in front of the cave.

“However, I’m not sure if that was really the keycard. I haven’t properly seen the thing. I wouldn’t joke about the thrown telephone card, right?”

“... Right. If you’re absolutely positive, then that’s a huge accomplishment.”

Being convinced of the reason, Horikita turned to alert Ibuki and secretly took out the card. I received and checked its front and back. The back side was the usual magnetic card, but as Ms Chabashira said the front side was having the proof of the leader. The name of Suzune Horikita was carved. Even when I tried touching it with hands, I understood it wasn’t something to be peeled off.

“Well? Is it the same card Katsuragi-kun had?”

“No... Hmm. I thought I’d know seeing it... But it’s of a different color than I remember.”

“There’s a possibility that the keycard is of different color depending on the class.”

“Indeed. But there’s a shortage of material to decide. If we make a mistake we can’t recover.”

When I tried to return the card, I dropped it from my hand on the ground.

“Oh!”

At the same time I let my voice in panic, Horikita immediately reached out her hand to pick it up. She put the card in her jacket, but due to the noise we naturally gathered the attention of surroundings.

“What happened?”

Kushida looked over here a bit worriedly. Ibuki as well.

“No, it’s nothing. There was a bug and I got surprised. Yuck.”

When I looked at Horikita apologizing, she glared at me terrified.

“S-sorry...”

Horikita became extremely furious and took a distance from me.

“Did she dump you?”

Yamauchi approached grinning.

"Look, Yamauchi. I have to ask for advice so would you lend me your ear?"

"What is it, is the consultation fee for love expensive?"

"This vicinity's ground is full of mud due to rain, right? I want you to put this mud all over Horikita's hair. Can I ask you that?"

"... Huh? If I do that I'd get killed! I certainly won't do that!"

Of course, I understood I won't get an agreement. However, this was an act that was too unnatural for me to carry out. Since Yamauchi is normally good at telling lies and doing pranks, I thought he could pull off this stunt.

"You know, even if Horikita gets mad at me it's still uncool to do a revenge."

"Maybe if you do it, you'll get an opportunity to get an email address from Sakura."

"Whaa— !?"

"How's that?"

"Huh, Sakura's email address... Hm. I, I'll do it."

Boy that lives for love quickly decides to die for it. This decisiveness is amazing.

"Are you absolutely sure? If you're lying I won't do it."

When I gave a sign, Yamauchi gathered up a lot of near-by mud with both hands and turned behind Horikita's back. If she had not been ill, she might have noticed signs, but Horikita couldn't afford to pay attention to her surroundings now. Kushida and Ibuki, noticing the bizarre behavior of Yamauchi, were watching curiously. And then, Yamauchi did it. With all one's strength he covered Horikita's beautiful black hair in mud with both hands. He filled her up all over with both hands. He didn't have to overdo it, but well...

"Ahaha! Horikita, you're full of mud! Funny!"

Like a youngster, Yamauchi laughed at the prank pointing finger.

As if she couldn't grasp the situation for a moment, Horikita didn't move for a while. However, when she understood it, she got up and without words

grabbed Yamauchi's hand that was pointing at her.

In a moment of confusion Horikita threw away Yamauchi.

Part 5

We returned to the base camp before noon with no result. Even without the sun, it was unbelievably hot in the forest during midsummer. Even Horikita, who said she didn't sweat, was slightly wet.

"You'd better wash yourself quickly, Horikita-san. You're quite muddy..."

"That's right... This situation is truly painful."

Having her hair and clothes covered in mud, Horikita was annoyed with displeasure. She wasn't excepted even with her bad physical condition.

"It's because I resent you for a lifetime. Prepare yourself."

Burbling Yamauchi hid behind my back, trembling in fear.

"I-I-I, I di-did it. Promise, keep your promise!"

"It's alright. I'll tell you after the trial."

It might have been bad for Sakura, but Yamauchi needed a compensation for his heroic act.

"Oh no, looks like it's impossible to use the shower room..."

The girls who had already returned from the search gathered in front of the shower room waiting for their turn. Ironically, Karuizawa and two other girls from her group were standing in line. Even if Horikita and the others stood in line now, it would be a long wait. But due to various reasons of her muddiness, she wasn't thinking of surrendering to Karuizawa who showed hostility towards Horikita. It looked difficult to cut in there.

"How about using the river? It's easy, right?"

"... Right. Looks like there's no other option."

"I could go swim as well. Would you come with us, Ibuki-san? I sweat a lot. If we get the approval then C class can use the river?"

Using the spot without permission was the unquestionable rule.

"I'll pass. I'll quietly wait for the shower room since I don't like swimming."

"Well, well me too..."

Taking advantage, Sakura refused as well not wanting to expose her bathing suit to boys' view. Horikita turned her back after seeing the shower room once again. The shower room with its source of hot water was the best for sure, but regardless of the cloudy sky it was quite humid. She didn't have confidence to keep on waiting with her bad condition.

I was heading towards the front of the tent together with burbling Yamauchi.

"I'll rest in the tent for a while. It hurts where I was hit..."

It looked like Yamauchi was crying entering the tent while walking unsteadily. Although a suitable person, he really did a harsh favor...

Well, let's go back to Horikita's state. She disappeared from our views having already started to change into her swimming suit. During that time the number of people waiting for the shower room gradually increased. Behind Karuizawa and the others were Sakura and Ibuki. Two other girls lined in the back.

On the other side, the number of students enjoying their time swimming in the river was big as well. A few minutes later Horikita and Kushida appeared in swimming suits as well.

I went to the luggage storehouse where the boys' bags were placed alone. Then I was walking inside the camp from one place to the other searching for a less popular place. When I returned about 5 minutes later, I saw Horikita who was washing herself in the river standing up. The cold river's water must have been a poison to Horikita's sick body, but she was satisfied with washing away the mud.

"Uh-oh, looks like you worked hard."

Seeing Ibuki at the very end of the shower room's line, I slightly nodded.

Part 6

I was waiting 15 minutes in front of the boys' tent for Horikita to come out. She stood stock still for a while, laying her eyes down to check up her condition. She then slowly raised her head looking around. When her eyes met mine, her pupils swayed for a moment. Her figure approaching me with heavy footsteps didn't seem to be frail.

"... Ayanokouji-kun. Could you come for a moment..."

I turned around once again to check if Ibuki lined in front of the shower room.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

"Follow me... We can't talk here."

With only uttering this, Horikita left the camp moving towards the forest.

"What happened? Are we going to enter the forest searching for food again?"

Horikita kept on walking without answering my calls. She stopped once we couldn't see the camp anymore. Horikita turned back wanting to say something, but hesitated for a moment as if having second thoughts.

"... It was my negligence. I wanted to say to you after I realized it was a mistake. Is that alright?"

"Mistake?"

"... It is stolen."

"Y-you aren't saying your underwears were stolen, are you?"

"No. Even worse. The thing stolen is... key card. It was a complete mistake."

Falling into self-hatred, Horikita showed a facial expression I hadn't seen until now.

"I wanted to talk to you since I trust you. I couldn't consult with someone who might be a culprit. It's so embarrassing I want to die..."

I was honored to hear that, but I couldn't possibly rejoice in front of her when she was feeling down.

“Such a big mistake...”

“No, the one who stole it is to blame. Alright?”

“Even so, it’s a matter of responsibility. It has nothing to do with me being in a bad physical condition or covered in mud.” Said Horikita regretfully, casting her eyes down. The leakage of information could bring big damage in the trial.

“I shouldn’t have let go of the card even for one second. But instead, I...”

“Don’t blame yourself. Maybe it won’t console you, but I think you did the best you could do.”

I didn’t know if she had heard me. All she did was bit her lower lip as in regret.

“We shouldn’t announce this publicly for now. We should grasp the situation first.”

“Yes... I think so too.”

Everyone would have panicked if they had known the truth. I wanted to avoid that at least.

“I suspect two persons. Karuizawa and Ibuki.”

The former one would have done it out of simple hatred. Horikita hurriedly explained she could have stolen it out of fun.

“The chances are low. Karuizawa was the whole time in front of the shower room.”

“Are you sure...?”

“Yes, I can affirm. The same thing about the two girls who were receiving orders from her.”

“If that’s correct, the chances of Ibuki being the culprit is high. She could have known about the existence of the card in the morning and the timing was just too good. However, don’t you think stealing is a very dangerous stake? Since the name of the leader is carved on the key card, only looking at it is supposed to be enough. Maybe she’s mimicking crime on purpose.”

As if seeking for my answer, she looked at me with suspense. I laid my hand on Horikita’s shoulder and calmly said:

“We could understand that if we examine the timing and inquire Ibuki. If we’re going to doubt Ibuki then we shouldn’t keep our eyes off her. Her escaping away would be the worst scenario.”

“That’s right. But excuse me, I wonder if you could return before me to follow her immediately.”

“... Is that so? I get it. I’ll go back and look out for Ibuki.”

She probably had the urge to be alone in order to throw up. I left Horikita by herself and returned to the base camp.

Part 7

After about 10 minutes, Horikita came back and felt the uneasy air of the campsite. It was because of the dark smoke that could be seen from the back of the temporary toilet.

It was too early to make a fire. She also noticed that the place where this was coming from was very strange.

“What’s that smoke? What on earth happened?”

As I joined Horikita, I caught Ike’s tension nearby and asked him about the situation.

“This is serious. It’s a fire! Fire! Something is burning behind the toilet!”

All the girls who were lined up in front of the shower room are gone. As soon as they heard that a fire broke out, they must have left in a hurry.

“I can’t see Ibuki. The fire might have been her work. Where is she?”

“As soon as she noticed the fire, she just walked there.”

I hurried to the back of the temporary toilet, there were Hirata and the others.

Ibuki was also there.

Horikita was ready to call out Ibuki, however the moment she saw her profile, she hesitated. Because Ibuki’s expression was so genuine. She couldn’t hide her confusion about the fire. That’s the face she was making.

“Does that mean... She didn’t do this?”

Such doubts attacked Horikita, causing her confusion.

If it was for the key card to be stolen, it had to be Ibuki. If there was a fire, only Ibuki could have caused it. Nevertheless, Ibuki was still on the scene and acted surprised by the fire.

When I looked into the origin of the fire, there was something left after the east side of the papers got burnt. But since most of it had been already turned

into soot, I couldn't tell exactly what it was, as I saw it just for a moment.

However, some parts that had not burned completely looked familiar, so the moment I saw them, I realised.

"Did the manual get burnt?"

Horikita also noticed the same thing, so she raised the question.

"Yup. Apparently, it looks like that. Who would do this?..."

"... It's one after another...."

Horikita gave a small cough and looked down regretfully.

"I am responsible for this. The manual was kept in my bag. We kept them all piled up in front of the tent and I didn't expect mine to be stolen by someone during daytime. But first I have to digest properly what happened."

Rather than searching for the culprit, Hirata headed towards the river as he preferred to extinguish the fire first.

While scooping water in an empty plastic bottle, Hirata coughed with a gloomy expression on his face.

"Why... Who would have done something like this... Why can't we all come along..."

Spontaneously, with all his might, he squashed the plastic bottle in his hands.

Where did his usual refreshing expression go? There was a terrible atmosphere hanging in the air.

Hirata's body and mind, as he constantly worked as the leader to consolidate our class, continued to bear a heavy burden.

"I don't think you have to overburden yourself."

I said words that couldn't be considered comforting to Hirata, however, he stood up muffling a thank you.

"This incident... We have to discuss it, properly."

"That's right. Most of D class has witnessed the fire. I am sure they would like to find out the truth."

With a depressed expression, Hirata returned to the site of the fire, holding the scooped water in his hands.

“Hey, who did this? Does that mean there is a traitor in our class?”

When we went back, we found Karuizawa at the head of a confrontation between boys and girls.

“Why are you suspecting us? Isn’t this a whole different matter from the one with the underwear?”

“You think we don’t get it? Did you not burn it, so that you can mislead us?”

“Don’t speak nonsense, as if we could do something like this.”

“Wait a moment, everyone! Let’s calm down and discuss altogether.”

I received a request from Hirata to pass the water. Instead of him, I overtook the mission to extinguish the remnants of the fire.

At once Hirata went to the center of the circle and intervened to mediate and convince them not to quarrel.

It may have been due to yesterday’s theft of underwear incident, but both sides have now heated up and showed no sign of settling down.

It seemed that the members of D class couldn’t help starting a hunt for the culprit here.

“For the time being, there’s no fear for the flames to spread out.”

Shaking the overturned empty plastic bottle a few times. There should have been no more contents left inside, but one by one a few drops of water trickled down the fire.

I looked up at the sky.

“Rain...”

Drops of water were falling and dripping onto my cheeks. The clouds were getting darker than before.

This was proof that heavy rain would come soon.

Originally, all of us agreed to unite and overcome the last pinch.

But now, boys and girls were strongly opposed to each other, and they remained unmoved as if they were having a real war with each other.

"I can't do this, anymore. Seriously, this is the worst. Having arsonists and underwear thieves in this class, this is the lowest of the low."

"That's why we've been telling you that it wasn't us! How long are you going to keep suspecting us?"

A quarrel that could keep going forever.

Hirata was supposed to stop this soon as usual, but he was standing still, looking dumbfounded for some reason.

Was he thinking about who could be the culprit?

"Kanji, I can't see Ibuki...?"

Yamauchi noticed that Ibuki, who was nearby some time ago, wasn't here anymore. And I noticed that the bag that should have been left here was also gone.

"Perhaps, the culprit of this fire...."

"You're also doubtful, I see. If she was to start a fire, well, as expected...."

Men's suspicions began to turn towards Ikuki, and the girls also begun to doubt Ibuki little by little. However, before the resolution, the rain began to fall gradually stronger and stronger.

"Crap. Let's postpone the discussion for the time being. It's terrible if we're going to get drenched."

Ike and others, in hot haste, began to put into the tent the food and packages taken out.

"Hirata, give us instructions."

Ike called out to Hirata but, he still stood motionless in the same place. Hirata was staring at the empty space and didn't move the whole time. In the meantime, the sound of the falling rain was gradually getting stronger. I was getting anxious for this situation, so I approached Hirata but I didn't get any sign of recognition.

"Why.....Why is this happening.....It's the same as that time...."

He coughed out lightly. I couldn't understand the meaning but it's certain that it's not a trivial matter.

This is not like Hirata at all. Hirata, who is always calm and composed.

"Because of me, up until now....."

"Hey Hirata, what are you doing! !"

A voice called Hirata from a distance. Still Hirata made no move, whether he had heard it or not. I gently placed my hand on his shoulder and he slowly turned over and looked back to me, surprised and astonished.

"Ike is calling."

".....eh."

Hirata's expression completely lost life — he was turning pale. The second time that Ike called Hirata, he slowly regained back his sanity. So in that moment, he finally noticed it was raining.

"Rain....."

"It'd be better for you to help Ike and the others. We have to keep the clothes dry."

"Well, I have to settle everything quickly."

"Ayanokoji. Is that fellow, Hirata, okay?"

"As expected, it looked like a shock. Probably because many accidents happened in succession."

"In middle school, there was a young master and an honor student, and I guess he carried a lot of heavy responsibilities? Due to the fact that he took too many of them upon himself, he ended up exploding. From there, for a short time his class became a mess."

"Do you feel there's this sign in Hirata too?"

"Well, still it's an exaggeration to say he'll explode. In some respects, it's too much of a danger though."

I wonder if it'll be like Sudo's wild intuition. But he seems to strike the point unexpectedly. Since the start of this special exam, Hirata has been burdened with various things. It would be strange to compare these difficulties with the common trouble of school life. For sure, the environment surrounding Hirata was starting to change.

The issue of Karuizawa's underwear, the mud, and the uproar of the fire. His heart was stormy like this sky.

"Well, for now, let's do something to take care of the baggage."

We joined to help the students who had already begun putting them in order. Thankfully, it was all completed in about 1 minute.

"Ok....All the preparations are over."

I supposed that Ibuki was going to disappear but at the same time Horikita did too. I read this as a fifty-fifty possibility but rather, she probably proceeded voluntarily towards a favourable direction. As soon as I focused on the road leading to the beach, I slowly stepped forward towards it.

Part 8

Amidst the rain which began to fall heavily, I forced my sluggish body to chase after Ibuki. The sky, covered with rain clouds, blocked the sun, and visibility was poor. Even though I couldn't see Ibuki, fortunately there were footprints on the muddy ground. I'm sure that if I follow them, they will lead me to her.

She walked around a 100 meters from the base camp, going sometimes left and sometimes right, along the way. Then, unexpectedly, her figure stood still, as if she stopped and waited for someone to come and meet her. Inadvertently, I went into hiding, even though this action had no meaning.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Without even turning to look back, I heard Ibuki's calm voice through the sound of the falling rain.

"I am aware that you have been following me. Why don't you come out already?"

"Since when did you notice it?"

"Right from the start."

Her short answer, gave me an ominous feeling that I had not felt from her before. Her quiet and reticent impression didn't seem to change. But, something was different.

"So, what is the reason, you've been following, me?"

"I wonder if you do not know, unless I tell you directly."

"I don't know."

Now she made me look like I was the villain.

"You clearly understand very well why you are being followed, right?"

"I really have no idea. Why? What's the reason?"

Turning back to face me, Ibuki was looking at me straight in the eyes. There was no dejection in her eyes. I almost had the urge to apologize to her. I had no

definite proof either. I was just acting based on my own intuition.

“Don’t you think that there is no use in lying, anymore?”

I felt my own hesitation for a moment, but I pressed on for an answer.

“At least I want to hear from your own mouth, the reason why have you been following me.”

“From the case of a piece of underwear being stolen, to the tumult of the fire. D Class has had a series of misfortunes.”

“So what?”

“Do you realise that some people suspected you?”

“Ah!. Since I am an outsider. It cannot be helped being suspected.”

“In other words, that’s what I mean.”

“That I am the culprit. So where are the evidence?”

“Unfortunately, there is no evidence at all about the underwear theft. Even so, I think it was you.”

“This is quite a terrible story. You suspect me, even though there is no proof.”

Well, she was so good at it. I could only praise her.

She didn’t make her move until the 5th day and she did not try to approach anyone from D class, at all. This stance, conversely, allowed her to spend time with us, without being suspected.

“The reason I suspect you is because of today’s actions. You do not need a further explanation, do you?”

Somehow, I wanted to take a testimony out of Ibuki. Trying to make me explain all the reasons why I suspect her. It’s like to admit that I am the leader. Even if I am 99 percent certain that she is guilty, if there’s a possibility of one percent that she is innocent, then, I should avoid pursuing things straight.

“Let’s get straight to the point. Give back what you’ve stolen from me.”

I said that to Ibuki who was standing in front of me, but without looking in her eyes.

“Whatever..”

Giving a short answer, she began to walk at a quick pace. I also kept chasing her, following her speed.

Ibuki changed her course heading straight into the forest.

“Where are you going?”

“Let’s see, where am I going to?”

It was difficult to walk straight into the woods. I realised this in the past several days. Even more so in this weather, which doesn’t give us much visibility. However, Ibuki didn’t seem to care and stepped further into the woods. I also couldn’t pull back, here. I have been following her, in order to find out the truth. Now that I have made a mistake, I must take the responsibility of solving the problem.

I must make up for my mistake. I must make up for my mistake.

The same words repeated over and over again in my head.

The trial had just begun. I couldn’t fail here... Besides, it is my mistake for being so aggressive towards Karuizawa.

My heart beat became intense. Little by little. I held my breath and cut down the distance to Ibuki. It depended on the situation, but it might be necessary to consider recovering the key card by force.

It’s alright. If it’s me, I can do it.

I can do it, I can do it, I can do it...

I understand fully well, that I am not calm. But still, I have to do something about it now. I have been doing well on my own so far, and I will continue to do well by myself. There is no one else to turn to.

Being in the forest was somewhat better than being in the open, on the road where the rain and the wind were fierce. But the visibility was even worse, and the footing was much worse than I expected. And as I went right and left along the path, I naturally lost my sense of direction.

But my biggest problem was my physical condition. I have noticed from a little while ago that as time passed, it deteriorated. Up until now, I had signs of a

little fever, but maybe because of this rain, my body temperature dropped. My limit line had collapsed and a cold was coming to attack me all of a sudden.

When Ibuki suddenly stopped, she unexpectedly looked up at the tree. A piece of handkerchief wet with rain was tied in front of her.

“Until when will you chase me? Would you stop it?”

“Until you return what you’ve stolen from me.”

“Would you calm down and think for a bit? If I had stolen the keycard, it’s not like I would have had such a dangerous thing forever. Someone seeing that means immediate disqualification. I won’t end up just losing points.”

I didn’t refer to a keycard even once while telling her to return the stolen item. In other words, it looks like Ibuki confessed in that moment. She showed me her white teeth while faintly smiling as I was trying to pursue that point.

“You thought I had confessed? Sorry, but that’s wrong.”

“If that’s so, then what’s the deal...”

“I’m fed up talking with you.”

Ibuki crouched down starting to dig the ground using both hands.

“Oh, hah...”

Being struck by intense dizziness and nausea, I leaned on a large tree beside me without thinking.

“You look very sick.”

Ibuki turned her head once noticing my condition. However, she continued with her operation.

“Ohh... Ohh... Hah...”

Until now I managed to breath normally to the utmost, but I couldn’t endure anymore. My jersey soaked with downpouring rain suddenly snatched my body temperature away. I fought against the feeling of wanting to lay down the best I could, but I couldn’t properly lift my head. ...When I thought about my resilience, it only really started there.

“Ibuki-san. I’ll start investigating you using sheer strength. You won’t mind?”

Muttering, Ibuki stopped digging up the earth, stood up and approached.

“—— Sheer strength? Would you be more specific? To wield violence?”

“... This is the last warning. Return it obediently.”

I confronted Ibuki with a sharp tone. I wanted to avoid using force, but there was no other way. I can't show this side of self to anyone...

There was a problem with Sudou that had occurred before. He was hitting C class students and the case turned out in a trial involving the school. That time, I condemned Sudou who had to deal with a lot of unexpected difficulties. I deserted it then as a well-deserved punishment. To think that I was about to try to solve things with violence like this is seriously hilarious.

“The last warning, huh... I get it, I get it. So what if I do as you please?”

She dropped the bag onto the ground, lightly raised her hands and took a pose of surrender. She got here very obediently. I couldn't watch her resignation, but I couldn't let go of this opportunity.

I stretched out my hands, checking the bag first.

The next moment, Ibuki's small leg aimed for my face. The smallest precaution saved me. I bounced backwards, avoiding the kick. The thief jumped and took a defensive posture clinging to both hands.

“You'll really do it.”

“Violent act means immediate disqualification...”

“Are you saying someone might see us in this place? You're willing to do it as well.”

While I was contemplating whether she smiled suggestively, she grabbed my shoulders and pushed me down in the next moment. Without even managing to react defensively to the unexpected events, I collapsed into the muddy ground.

“Would you like a few moments to rest?”

Her face looking down on me from above seemed blurred to me, who was riddled with wounds. Ibuki made a fist tightly as she grasped my collar and

pulled up the upper part of my body. If I received this directly, it would tear my consciousness to pieces. I dusted it off, rolled on the ground, and escaped. I got up from the muddy ground with my hands, desperately trying to raise the upper part of my body. For the first time, I was glad I did martial arts.

“Huh? You can sure move. You practiced something?”

Without losing her head, Ibuki looked at me in evaluation as if impressed. Detecting instantly that I had knowledge of martial arts, she realized I wasn’t an average person. How should I respond without telling her that my condition is at its worst?

“Indeed... I’m nothing but failure in this trial.”

I have not contributed a thing to D class. In fact, in spite of my poor physical condition, I butted in trying to pull D class’ legs that were working so hard. I wish I could have reported from the start.

Since I felt unwell, I could have requested another person to be the leader. Or I could have just refused. But my pride interfered which was unforgivable.

I made a fool out of many, and hated the fact that I, who had cursed at those incompetent, wasn’t of any use. Ha ha... I let a dry laugh in my mind. Was it until now that I made excuses for myself like this?

“It was you, right...? Who stole the keycard.”

Ibuki, who I was trying to chase, stopped. We shortened the distance shortly after. She pretended to do an attack with her right arm, only to do a high, fast kick with her leg. I escaped her attack and stretched my arm trying to distract her counterattack. Ibuki avoided my arm being instantly aware of the danger. She then switched over the next attack, forcing me to do a bewildering defense.

While having bad foothold, I kept the center of the gravity low, without worrying about giving the impression that I had the skills. Besides, in her, I didn’t see any hesitation in hurting others.

Ibuki laughed showing her white teeth, like she was enjoying this situation. I never thought I would see her with such a big smile. Because of all the moving around, I was attacked by an intense cold and nausea. It was only a matter of time to stand still until the end.

"You did your best until here so I'll give you a reward and tell you the truth. I'm the one who stole the keycard."

Ibuki put her hands in her pocket and slowly she took out the card. On the surface facing my way, my name was engraved firmly.

"You admitted it pretty quickly after all that."

"It has come to a point where it doesn't matter whether I admit it or not. There's no striking evidence that I hurt you. It's not like the school can make a right judgement. Isn't that right?"

Ibuki's reading was right. There was no factor that could make the school perceive this situation as it really was.

Ibuki reached the same conclusion. Even if I got damage unilaterally here, Ibuki could find any excuse as much as she liked. Even if I complained, the two guilty parties of the crimes won't get punished. It was D class that had many points to lose.

But, if I managed to get back the keycard, we could possibly be saved. By seizing reliable evidence, there was no choice but to force C class to admit to their faults.

Fingertips remained on the keycard.

There was a chance that we could claim its legitimacy if stolen. If it functioned to make the truth come to light, the school may thoroughly investigate as well. I couldn't abandon that hope. But I couldn't get back the keycard unless I gained total control of Ibuki's next actions. I couldn't believe she was stupid enough to show this kind of bold behavior.

If she took it away, the card won't ever be discovered or found anywhere else.

If that happened, it'd only become a dispute involving me not stealing what had already been stolen.

From there, I had no more energy to break into a run and draw near to her. To make matters worse, I had no strength in my fist either. But all I had to do was to make use of whatever force I had left.

I wonder if Ibuki had some reasons why she was rushing things, or she was just underestimating me. I advanced through the ground and commenced the attack. Like a hunter who enjoyed a one-sided hunt. She glanced at me for a moment, taking advantage of my weak situation.

She was all fake.

While I focused my attention on the lower half of the body, she turned without wavering and swung her right fist with the smallest movement. She barely grazed my hair and avoided any physical contact or attack at any short distance, then she applied a little force to the back of my body and made use of her momentum. Even if I was incompetent then, I'd still try everything until I defeated her.

I tried to take her arms and she lost her balance but again, she grasped the situation in a moment and slipped through my arm. I was trying to see things through by using my strength and speed but I was also avoiding any physical contact. I mustered my remaining strength and I drove into the pit of her stomach with my left fist.

“Ah....”

Ibuki, who couldn't breathe anymore, kneeled on the spot like she was suffering. But at the same time my strength also reached the limit and my field of vision was distorted. There was no way I was going to chase her if she escaped, so I kept her under control.

“That's the worst...Already reached my limit.”

Because I moved my body intensely and overdid things, my condition, which was already bad enough before, became hopeless. But I couldn't let myself collapse. My blow was superficial and it wouldn't defeat her.

“I don't know...I was sure you were involved in it.”

Ibuki stood up wiping her muddy face.

“Involved? In what.....?”

Ibuki showed a moment of hesitation but eventually, standing alone, she revealed.

“I didn’t burn the manual.”

“Do you have the intention of just repeating a lie again?”

“What would my profit be in doing such a thing like the arson? It’s inevitable that people would want to search for the criminal again with the uproar of the fire. And I also would strongly suspect myself. But there’s only great damage and not even one advantage in this.”

“That’s...”

Certainly I agreed with what she was saying. She was stealing the keycard before the fire broke out. There was no time for her to bother burning the manual and fan the flames.

Then, who? Did it even make sense to burn the manual?

“The reason I talked to you in such a roundabout way was to confirm that. You seem to be much different. But in that case, it’s better to say that it was hard to understand. Do you think he’s in the D class? I’d say a guy who seemed to be aware of my crime even before you.”

Ibuki sighed as if she couldn’t understand.

“You mean....”

Immediately, after the appearance of said person in my mind, I noticed that Ibuki was gone. The next moment, a blow shocked me and hit me hard when she attacked my head with a blunt weapon. I fell, hard.

“Our conversation is over.”

I unconsciously started to feel that I had to get up, but the hand which had lightly been bruised by Ibuki’s right foot made me fall again. Then, Ibuki gripped my bangs firmly and pulled me up.

“Ah, let me go.....”

“Sorry. I’ve got a busy schedule ahead of me.”

Suddenly, she aimed at my face and slapped me with her right hand. My thoughts and my body were at their limit and it was impossible for me not to suffer damage. I shook off the hand that was gripping my bangs. Then, I tried to

get upright and draw distance with clumsy movements.

But my legs tangled and crumbled again to the ground like they used all their strength.

"Did you think that such a coercive method will be excused?"

"Come on now. I don't feel like answering."

When I narrowed the distance, she raised her feet high and kicked me in the face knocking me out.

How many times I repeated this to myself.

I.....made a great mistake.

In an attempt to repair that mistake by myself, I transformed it into an irreparable situation.

Part 8 (Ibuki)

I let out a deep breath overlooking Horikita who had lost her consciousness completely. It's been a while since I had such a stubborn opponent. Maybe if her physical condition had been good, it wouldn't have been a ridiculous situation regardless of the winner. She was that strong.

I continued what I was doing shortly afterwards and dug up the flashlight and transceiver wrapped in vinyl. Although I would have rather gotten by without using those if I could.

"What...?"

Right after I took out the two items buried in the ground, I was caught by a mysterious sensation. I didn't know the cause of it. It's just that for some reason I had a feeling they were different compared to the last time I had buried them.

"Could it be... due to rain?"

Concluding it must have been only my overthinking, I got my hands on the transceiver. Then I reported my current location to him who was waiting to be contacted from somewhere and sat down to rest.

30 minutes must have passed since then. A flashlight flashed its light in front of me. Two times. Three times. It was well-regulated like the Morse code. I did the same and sent a signal using the flashlight near my feet. In order to resonate with each other, his guiding light went stronger. With his irritating face I didn't want to see, Ryuuken showed up.

"Oi. Thank you for your hard work, Ibuki, it was a good performance."

"... That was justified, right?"

"Justified? You knew you had to do it without making a mess or you wouldn't have taken a risk coming here"

"There was no other way, right. I didn't think the digital camera would break."

That's right. If only the digital camera hadn't wrecked, I would have taken a photo of the keycard and everything would have ended there. I'd have a certain

proof in my hands. I wouldn't even have called Ryuuen using the transceiver. But as a result, I went into a big risk carrying the card that led to Horikita finding out my true colors.

"So, where's the card?"

"It's here."

I took the card from my pocket and handed it over to Ryuuen. Ryuuen illuminated the card with the flashlight, confirming the name carved on it was that of Horikita Suzune.

"You, come here to confirm it as well. You demanded it from the start. Be at ease. No one is supposed to be here in this weather and darkness. It's good to take precautions but don't waste your time."

A class' Katsuragi appeared from his hiding place. He was the calm and steady type of guy. Completely opposite of our leader. I pretended to be calm, but my mind couldn't help but be once again aware of Ryuuen's awfulness. Right after this trial started, Ryuuen said he'll coax A class against me and he really did carry that out. But how the hell...

Taking Horikita's card from Ryuuen, Katsuragi observed it with his own eyes. It couldn't have been forged in this uninhabited island.

"Looks like the real thing."

"Do you agree with this?"

Although it exhibited a certain proof, Katsuragi didn't change his stern expression. I've heard he's a cautious guy, but being this careful is kind of a disease.

"You managed to infiltrate into D class well. Weren't you suspected?"

"Under normal circumstances I would have been. But, how I managed to do it – that's a secret to be traded."

I unconsciously rubbed my cheek. When the espionage operation was launched on D class, Ryuuen hit me to make my leave less fake. But the pain and the hatred behind it was all real. Naturally, I misunderstood that students in class D were beaten and kicked out as well. Maybe if I hadn't been injured, I

wouldn't have gotten in so smoothly.

"Don't ponder about it forever. It's a black-and-white situation. Besides, you've already done half a thing for us. Don't be stupid and withdraw here."

"...That's right."

Although he replied this, it looked like they didn't reach consent. Perceiving this, Ryuuen smiled as if ready to attack his prey. Rather than getting annoyed, he whispered:

"What would you do if this is not a meritorious deed? Did you know that Sakayanagi's faction has now overtaken yours and has the majority ever since the rumors spread about you failing to enter the student council after presenting yourself as a candidate? Here's your chance, right?"

"Son of a bitch... Why are you telling me this?"

"A class holds its firm place by forming alliances. If that's the case, even those who have betrayed you will come under your umbrella. Or will I turn to an enemy? What will happen if that's true..."

It's not like Katsuragi signed a contract with the devil. He was just negotiating. But that thought was naïve. Once you discuss with the devil, it will lead to a mandatory blood contract.

"Sakayanagi is now absent. It's impossible that someone who can't make decisions here rules A class."

"...We've concluded the negotiation as promised. I'll accept your proposal."

Having said this, Katsuragi stretched his arm to Ryuuen. Without an answer, Ryuuen boldly smiled.

"That's good. You've made a right judgement."

"But what's the negotiation about? Would you explain to me in detail?"

I didn't care whatever they did, but I had the right to know details. After aiming for A class, I had to decide if being connected with Ryuuen had been the right thing to do.

"To unite with A class."

"Let me return. I don't want to arouse suspicion staying here longer than normal"

Katsuragi returned the card to me. Then he disappeared in the darkness.

"So, what about negotiation? What are the details? What's the compensation?"

Thunder came roaring from the sea right after thunderstorms filled the sky with shining white light. Without even being surprised, Ryuuen, with an eerie smile, told me the details of the contract. Those details weren't simple, but complicated. However, even with ordinary methods piling up troubles, and achievements that were surely difficult, there was the promise of a big reward.

Before the beginning of the trial where the majority of students was about to retire and fully enjoy holiday on a boat, a situation no one imagined had happened and just about everything moved according to Ryuuen's aim. I hated this guy's guts to the point I wanted him dead, but he was extremely close to A class after all. I confirmed this again.

"But... Is there a guarantee Katsuragi will continue keeping the promise? Even on a wastepaper."

"Naturally, there's a cover for it. He has no choice but to keep it."

I walked up to Horikita and grasped the keycard with her hand after wiping off my fingertips. There was nothing this girl could have done. She could have only stayed silent and endure knowing C class had found out about her leadership until the end of the trial.

I was sure about it after observing D class for a week. This girl didn't trust anyone. Even after knowing the keycard was stolen she didn't inform her classmates. It looked like she had opened her heart to Ayanokouji only to isolate from that guy again.

In addition, if we added up her incompetence, she would be harmless.

Besides, if she had the keycard, the fact her leadership was found out due to her mistake might have not been leaked to D class. I understood this girl's nature to a certain extent. Patient and stubborn. The type of person that doesn't listen to others' opinions. In other words, no matter how painful it is

she will endure it for the remaining time.

“Use your smart head and protect yourself.”

In the darkness, we disappeared in the woods quietly.

Part 9

I kicked the wet ground and ran after Ibuki. One bothersome problem was the weather. Depending on the weather, there might be the possibility of getting stuck somewhere or getting involved into an accident. It was also a concern the fact that the sun would go down sooner than I expected and it'd be difficult to push forward without a flashlight.

The passing shower became stronger and the wind was also starting to blow more violently. The weather was just one of the bad circumstances. There was no advantage here. Visibility could only be maintained for a few meters due to the pouring rain. And even if it looked like I lost my way, thanks to the rain, the footprints of two people remained on the muddy ground, so it was easy to follow them.

Those footprints suddenly vanished. No, they weren't interrupted, rather they continued in the deeper forest. This implied that the path changed sharply and the persons intentionally bought themselves into the forest, they didn't go astray. Using the flashlight, when I aimed the light deeper in the forest, the two pairs of footsteps gradually were entering deeper and deeper. There was no reason why those people would put their feet in a dangerous forest like that.

Just to be sure, I tried to illuminate the regular route leading to the beach, but there were no footprints there and the ground was clean. With my hand, I cleared away the dripping rain from my bangs. Then I followed the footprints and went into the forest.

Naturally, the visibility soon got worse. It was safe to say it seemed night already. The ominous atmosphere floated around the dark forest but I pushed forward relying only on the footprints.

It happened about 30 meters after. In a moment, I felt a light entering brightly in my field of vision.

Immediately, I turned off the flashlight and concealed my breath. Staring fixedly at the direction of that brightness, I could see the light again. It was a flashlight. It was like it was sending off a signal. Ibuki and Horikita? No. Both of

them wouldn't have anything to make a light. I quietly turned my feet towards that light and shortened the distance.

Hearing voices of people making small noises in the rain, I concealed myself. It didn't matter who was there and what they were talking about. The problem was that I discovered them. Grasping the situation was secondary.

And then, shortly after, the light of the electric torch went far off. It seemed to be over. Just to be sure, I approached cautiously. And then, there.....

Near a big tree, there was Horikita's figure, covered in mud, who lost consciousness and she really looked like she was dying.

A keycard was dropped to the ground near her hand that had no force left. On her injured body, traces of excavated soil. Looking at the situation, it was confirmed that Horikita has been found out as the class leader by none other than Ibuki. After picking up the keycard, I hoisted Horikita up in my arms.

"Um...."

I felt a sense of discomfort when I held her in my arms. I sighed faintly and Horikita, slowly but surely, opened her eyes very weakly.

"Did you come to your senses?"

"Ayano...Kouji-kun....."

Whether she could understand the situation, she uttered another faint comment.

".....my head....hurts....."

"You have a high fever. It's better for you not to strain to talk"

"I see....I, to Ibuki.....but, why are you here?"

Even if I told her to sleep, Horikita would concern herself with this and that problem while her fever was still rising. Then, she started to understand the situation little by little.

"As expected.....it was Ibuki who stole my card"

"I see"

"I can't be any more stupid than Sudo-kun and others. And I'm usually the

one who exposes the disgraceful behaviours”

She closed her eyes lamenting a situation I couldn’t do anything about.

“It’s not a trial where you should keep hiding for 24 hours. You can be open to attack”

I intended to follow-up with something else but it seemed like it made Horikita sad. She was too injured and in a state of total heartbreak.

“It could have been avoided if I knew how to rely on someone”

If you seriously wanted to protect the leader’s identity, you would have to rely on trustworthy people from the bottom of your heart. Doing so, people would have protected the existence of the card on a 24-hours basis. But Horikita had no friends who could have done it.

She looked miserable and she was coughing a little.

“When I was losing consciousness, I felt like I heard Ryuuen’s voice.....That’s odd, he should be retired since long ago....”

“You were losing consciousness. Maybe you saw him in your dream”

“If it was really a dream, it would be even worse”

I wonder if she really heard Ryuuen’s voice. Even if she fell asleep and lost consciousness, her brain probably allowed her to wake her up by herself after she heard something. It’s no wonder that she unknowingly picked up Ryuuen’s voice.

“I’m sorry”

While I was thinking silently, Horikita apologized.

“Why are you apologizing to me?”

“That’s because...there’s no else I can apologize to, except you”

Hmm yeah. It’s something that makes me think hard.

“If you think that’s bad, in the future try to make some reliable friends. Start from there”

“That’s difficult.....nobody is willing to be my ally”

I laughed when I felt the signs of such a resigned masochism.

“It’s no use even if you laugh, it’s pitiful to make fun of someone”

“No, it’s not that. I think, deep inside you, you’re starting to feel that you need allies”

“Nobody said that.....”

The usual Horikita, now, would be insulting the other party but this time, there was another meaning to her words. The meaning included in her words was that of «exchanging and changing» oneself. Otherwise she wouldn’t have said «Nobody who is willing to be my ally».

Still, it was not easy. Until now, nobody had any difficulties if he could change steadily and skillfully the way he was moving forward. Horikita’s vacant eyes seemed to be looking at someone else through me, rather than at me.

“Such a thing.....I understood it since long ago”

You should not live alone in this world. Both school and society consist of a huge amount of people.

“Don’t talk. You’re sick”

I can persuade her to be quite but Horikita didn’t stop her repentance. However, for Horikita, there are no alternatives other than rely on nobody. And even if she saw a new one, she couldn’t choose it.

“With my own strength, I will rise to A class. I will surely recover from this failure”

Without strength, she grabbed my sleeve and made an impassionate appeal.

“I’m ready to be cursed by all the classes....I failed to that extent”

“According to this school’s system, if you fight by yourself you can’t go up to A class. We need classmates’ cooperation at any cost. It’s inevitable”

She had no strength to keep her eyes open. So her eyes, in the end, shut. Horikita’s faint grasp on my sleeve, actually, made me feel strong.

“It’s impossible to admit. Regardless of how hard it is..... in the end...I am alone”

“Ahh Shut up. Stop talking. There’s no persuasive or convincing power in a sick person’s words”

I embraced Horikita a little strongly.

“You can’t bear heavy responsibilities. You’re not that strong. Sorry to tell you”

“You’re telling me to give up? I have a dream that my brother will recognize my dream to be in A class”

“I didn’t say that. You don’t have to give up”

I looked down to Horikita suffering and groaning a little in my chest and added these words.

“If you can’t fight by yourself, it’s better to fight with another. I will give you a hand”

“Why.....? You’re not the kind of person...who says such things...”

“Then, why not?”

It’s better for me to be intentionally vague. Shortly after, Horikita used up all of her strength and lost consciousness again. What I have to do now is carrying this out without being noticed by anyone. The easy choice would be to retire, but I don’t know which one is the emergency button on the wristwatch. If the helicopter is dispatched for an emergency, the sound will echo all around.

“I confused the road...it’s dangerous, dangerous..”

I was proceeding with the prayer to exit from the path but, unfortunately, I got out on a steep cliff.

Another step forward and I would have fallen. I tried to make light below. It seemed to be about 10 meters. Unfortunately, it looked like I was walking in the wrong direction. Anyway, should I retreat back to the original route? I tried to invert my direction slowly as to not to put a burden on Horikita, but right after

— — —

Unluckily, the soil under my footing collapsed and I lost my balance.

If I were alone, I would have grabbed a tree branch and I would have stepped

on it, but both of my hands were blocked with Horikita.

I fell. It was inevitable.

I curled up my body to protect Horikita but I tumbled down the steep slope at loss for what to do. For several seconds, I had the sense that I was flying. I can't remember clearly what happened after I fell.

Should I say that it's fortunate that it didn't hurt Horikita somehow? I looked up to the sloped but with my state of still holding Horikita in my arms, it's very unlikely for me to crawl up.

"I screwed up"

However, now it's not the time to be stuck here. This time I will carry the still unconscious Horikita on my back and I'll go forward with a single lightstick in the forest.

Rain came without mercy hitting my body and robbing away my physical strength. The heat that came from Horikita on my back is not usual. If she's exposed to the rain any longer, it could be dangerous.

But, here, deep in the forest, there were no caves or other man-made shelters that people could use, so, there was no other choice but to rely on the power of nature.

Fortunately, the trees here were overgrown, and depending on the place, our bodies may stay relatively dry.

I looked around for big trees and then I moved us right under them. Of course, it was better than being directly under the rain, for the rich foliage prevented a lot of rain.

Gently, I left Horikita to lay down on the ground.

Her jersey most probably will get dirty, but this is something that we have to put up with at a time like this. I sat there putting Horikita's head on my lap.

Here, there was some relief as the surrounding area is cool, however, the humidity was so high that it felt damp and hot.

Horikita's condition wasn't good. I felt her trembling as she curled her body from the cold.

I embraced Horikita holding her close to my chest as much as possible, hoping that the burden would be eased a little bit and just waited quietly for the time to pass.

How much time had already passed, I wondered.

Horikita finally woke up being her usual fierce self but she seemed to be absent-minded or maybe she was unable to understand the gravity of the situation in which we were.

“How... Did you?... I....”

I wondered if she was temporarily confused, it looked like she didn’t remember what happened a little while ago.

I explained what happened. However, I was a bit doubtful whether she understood it all clearly.

“That’s what happened... I remembered everything, now”

“That’s good”

“I don’t know how good this is. Since I can remember my mistake, I feel the worst”

If she could talk in such a self-deprecating manner, then, I was relieved for the time being.

“It’s almost six o’clock, Horikita. You might think that it is harsh, but you should retire. I guess your body is at its limit already”

She barely have come this far by pretending to be alright, but from now on this will no longer possible.

“I can’t do that. We can’t afford to lose 30 points, because of me... Wasn’t I, the one who confronted Karuizawa and the others who used our points, carelessly? It will make me look like a total fool...”

The penalty related to poor physical condition was severe. Speaking of the possible lost points alone, there were more than Karuizawa personally used.

She laid her arm bitterly over her own eyes, so that she could conceal the tears from her eyes.

"It's not only that... The key card was stolen from me, too. You clearly understand what that means..."

"D class will lose another 50 points."

Horikita nodded her head slightly. Then, D class would have just a few points left.

"Go back alone and leave me here. If we do this, at least for now, I will be the only one absent from the evening's roll call."

"And, what are you planning to do?"

"By tomorrow morning.... I will somehow return alone to the camp. If I manage to surpass my bad condition during morning roll call, then for sure we will be able to do something about retirement, too"

So we could pass this through with a minus 5 points. That was the target.

"This situation isn't so easy, you're pretty weak right now, and the teacher in charge isn't naive enough so that you get through this with a fake performance. Above all, it is impossible for you to get back on your own."

"Still, I have no other choice... So that some points remain in D class"

Aside from the key card case, there was still a possibility that we could protect some points in relation to roll calls and retirement. That was certainly not a small number.

"Go!"

Although Horikita was weak, I felt that behind her words, there was still some kind of an indomitable fighting spirit.

She could stand all the strain on her own, but it seemed to be unbearable for her to involve others.

Without saying a word, I rose up steadily, putting her head to rest on the base of the big tree.

She really meant to set me free from this situation.

"I will leave you alone without hesitation, but if things go on like this, our classmates will blame you"

"... Yeah. That's correct judgment. It was my responsibility and it's all my fault."

Horikita praised my cold decision as being accurate. But she was just feeling ashamed of herself for growing weak.

She embraced her trembling body to endure the cold.

It is hard when you are not dependent on others.

The weather was still stormy, and there was no sign that the rain or wind will end, soon.

"Can you really come back alone tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah... I'll be ok"

".... Horikita, do you really think that it's alright not to retire in this situation?"

I blurted out unnecessary words.

"Of course I won't... I do not have the option of retiring"

It was quite convenient to keep fighting with an indomitable fighting spirit, but then again, it had no meaning if you lost in the end.

"Hey. Why do you think we are driven to the corner, in despair?"

"My negligence brought mismanagement. That's all"

"That's not right. Not right at all"

Horikita Suzune fought as hard as she could. And tried to finish the test without failing.

".... Please, go.... Because I think of you as a friend, this is my request...."

Horikita said this and suddenly pressed her lips.

"I am going to make it right. As, if it didn't happen at all"

"No. I think this is the worst part of it"

"It's alright. I... alone!...."

And when she suddenly stood up she shut her eyes again in pain. After all, it was a burden for Horikita.

"Please, go...."

When she finished her sentence, Horikita lost consciousness, again.

I gently picked her up, shifted my position to make her feel even a little comfortable, and then, when I stood up, I looked up at the unquenchable darkness and I let out a sigh.

"It would have been much easier, if you had retired by your own will"

This stubborn princess will not resign from the exams until the very end.

Splendid. Yes, I think it's splendid. Your ideas and actions were almost right.

But, unfortunately, Horikita, there's one thing that's definitely wrong. Only now, this moment, let me tell you in all honesty.

I have never thought of you as a friend or an ally. I've never cared about you as a classmate.

In this world, winning is everything. The process to do so, does not matter.

I do not care what the cost is. I am totally fine as long as in the end, I have my victory.

You, Hirata and everyone else are only the tools for that.

It's not my fault that Horikita was driven to this point. I just complied with it.

So, don't blame yourself, Horikita. What I mean is that you were useful to me.

I walked down the muddy road, while lighting up the flashlight. My shoes were already covered with mud, and the inside of them was flooded.

I don't mind it anymore.

The first thing to do was to grasp an understanding of my location.

When I went down the slope, without a doubt I drifted far from the base camp of class D.

But I was sure if I turned the other way back, the distance to the shore should be way shorter.

I can go through the woods that I've been walking for several days, relying on the map in my head.

“It was close, after all”

Eventually, I reached the beach. The ship was afloat and its lights were reflected in the sea.

Then, it took me a couple of minutes to return to the previous place and pick up Horikita who had been lying on the ground, without any strength left.

Her beautiful face stained with mud. Although I lifted her up in my arms, there was no sign of her, regaining consciousness.

I took hold of Horikita and started walking towards the shore, instead of the base camp direction.

I continued walking, the time was around 7 in the afternoon, when I barely managed to get there in time.

The tents set up by the teachers were now folded so as not to be blown by the wind.

I went up the ramp on the pier and reached the deck of the ship.

Then one of the teachers noticed my presence and ran up to me.

“You are prohibited from entering here. You will be disqualified”

“I have an emergency case. She got a high fever and now she is unconscious. Please, allow her to rest at once.”

As soon as I explained the situation, the teacher skipped the instructions and brought a stretcher. I laid Horikita down.

“Is she ok with retiring?”

“That’s without a question. However, let me confirm something, please. Because it is not 8 o’clock yet, her roll call has no effect, right?”

It was fifty-eight minutes past seven, it’s almost certain that we are safe.

I must win the teacher’s promise, here.

“... Certainly. She is at the very limit, but you are out.”

“I understand. One more thing. This key card, I have to return it.”

I handed over the keycard from my pocket to the teacher.

"Well, then, I am going back to the exam"

I couldn't stay here. I was going down at the beach again, in the rain.

With this, class D would lose 30 points with Horikita's retirement and I would end up losing 5 more points with my absence during roll call.

Epilogue I: Raising the Curtain

August 7th. At last, our never-ending short life on the uninhabited island was reaching its end. Was our minimal salvation lying in the fact that we spent our time having modest fun in this cruel survival?

There was still no sight of Mr Mashima and others when noon arrived. It was time to end.

"I'll announce a tally of the trial's result. Please wait for a moment. Due to the trial being already over, we're kindly asking people wanting to use toilets or drink to use the rest spot."

With this announcement, the students went to gather in the rest spot in unison. Among others, there were tables and chairs prepared under the temporary tent and it seemed as if you could take plenty of rest. There was no sign that Kouenji, Horikita or retired students were waiting on the cruise ship. Sudou who was always with Ike and the others was standing still, looking up at the cruise ship.

"Ayanokouji. You're close with Horikita, right. ... How close, actually?"

Rather than getting mad or making a fuss, Sudou seriously wanted to know.

"There's nothing between us. We're just friends. Not more, not less."

"...Even that makes me jealous. I'm still treated as a friend."

Sudou seemed a little disappointed, maybe because he was irritated he couldn't find the girl.

"But even Horikita noticed you for a moment on this occasion?"

Without causing troubles, I took the initiative and acted in the name of the class while having Horikita in mind. A huge step-up.

"I hope so. After all, she couldn't call me by my first name."

"Good job, both of you. Thank you for everything this week. You really saved

us.”

Having said words of gratitude, Hirata appeared. He handed me one of the two paper cups he had. A cold sensation crossed my palm when I grabbed it with my hand. He handed Sudou the other one.

“It’s me who should be thankful. You followed me, a classroom’s outsider. Moreover, you covered up the fact that Horikita retired or when I got late for roll calls.”

“I couldn’t condemn you when I heard the reason. Besides, Horikita-san gave us a big information.”

“Do you believe what she said?”

“She isn’t a type that would say irresponsible stuff. That’s why you got close, didn’t you?”

This guy would protect a colleague even if he had to gamble his pure reputation.

“I’d be lying if I said there’s no risk, but I have to act for Horikita.”

“That’s my friend,” said Hirata softly. His profile was like that of a phantom. As if there was a non-comprehensive part in our dialogue, Sudou tilted his head.

“Information? What’s that about?”

“I think you’ll figure it out pretty soon. Even so, C class is strange... On a whole other level.”

Due to most of C class’ students retiring during the roll call of the second day, there was no one left in this spot. I couldn’t find Ibuki anywhere on the sandy beach as if she had also retired. Only the bizarre sight of Ryuuen was ahead us.

“Why is he... Why only Ryuuen hasn’t retired?”

When Hirata and I peeped from a distance, he turned his head in our direction as if being aware of our gazes. He then slowly moved closer as if thinking something. Tension arose in the air.

“Oi, stalkers. What happened to Suzune?”

Ignoring Hirata’s presence, Ryuuen came closer with a paper cup in his hand.

Hearing “Suzune” coming from Ryuuuen’s mouth, I became aware of Sudou’s head vein pulsing due to his glare.

“It’d be a problem if you hear it from us.”

“I know you chased around Suzune’s ass. We were together before that.”

Having drained its content, Ryuuuen lightly crushed the paper cup and threw it at my feet.

“Throw that thing for me.”

Sudou, after ignoring it with all his strength, kicked the paper cup covered with sand back.

“What a childish thing to say. Pick up your garbage.”

“Picking up garbage suits well with defectives.”

Unlike Sudou who was radiating intimidation, Ryuuuen didn’t show signs of caring about anything.

“Calm down, Sudou-kun. I’ll throw the garbage away.”

When Hirata hurriedly picked up the garbage, Sudou clicked his tongue and kicked the sand. Ryuuuen tediously moved away his gaze. He had dirt all over his upper body and his pants and jersey were also full of dirt. I didn’t think he had given up on his efforts.

“You didn’t retire, Ryuuuen-kun.”

“Who are you? And where is Suzune? I thought of sweetly grabbing her ass.”

The second time he said “Suzune”, having associated it with an insult again, Sudou approached Ryuuuen while kicking the sandy beach and grasped his collar.

“What are you doing?”

With zero agitation, Ryuuuen accepted Sudou’s intense gaze straightforwardly.

“Next time you say a stupid thing, I’ll kill you.”

“Huh? What is it punk, getting excited all by yourself.”

With even Hirata slipping away from a fight that was about to start any second, Ryuuuen was tearing off Sudou.

"Horikita-san retired yesterday. She's not here."

"... Retired? Suzune? She doesn't seem like a girl that would retire"

"That's..."

The squeaky sound of the speaker's switch-on enveloped the beach and Mr Mashima appears.

The first years hurried to form a line, but Mr Mashima stopped them with a sign of his hands.

"You may relax, now. The exam has already finished. Now, this part is our summer vacation. It is alright to act more freely."

Even so, the students were still naturally tense and their chatter disappeared instantly.

"This past week, We, the teachers were able to keep an eye on your efforts in the special examination. There were students who took this exam directly up front and those who used their scheming abilities into this exam. Various things happened, but I think that the test results were splendid, overall. We appreciate your hard work."

The students felt kind of relieved hearing the praise from Mr Mashima. Finally, w

e were starting to feel like we had finished this one week exam.

"Well, then, without further ado, I would like to announce the final result of the special exam."

Perhaps no one, including our homeroom teacher, had seen through the results of this test.

"We will not accept any questions or inquiries about the test results. You should accept the outcome of the exam and then we would like you to analyze them and use them to help you for the next exam."

"It is what it is. Do not lose your temper. Accept the reality, properly, alright?"

"It is you guys from Class C that should be worried, you used all your points, right? Ridiculous!"

Sudou made fun of the well-known recklessness of Class C.

“We are left with 125 points, including the bonus points that we accumulated. I think that we are going to be fine.”

Hirata may have felt a little irritated by Ryuuen’s unreasonable provocation. So he answered with a sense of pride. Ryuuen on the other way, acted disgusted towards Hirata’s immature words and made a gesture like vomiting.

“Oh! I envy the nerve of the small fry, when they are satisfied with such a small amount of points.”

“It does not matter what you say, Class C still gets 0 points.”

“Oh ho ho. You are not to decide on your own. Certainly, we have used up all our 300 points. However, have you forgotten the additional rules of this exam?”

“... You are saying that you are going to expose our class leader, that’s what it is.”

“That’s right. I wrote it on the paper, didn’t I? The name of the leader of your Class D!”

Me and also Hirata tried not to show any emotion on our faces, but Sudou felt the shock of these words in his face.

“And I did the same thing to our colleagues from Class A and Class B. Do you understand what that means?”

“Wait a minute. What do you mean? Hey!? If this is true...”

“Your false assumption against Class D, along with your other wrong guesses will result in a penalty and you will lose 100 points in total.”

That moment, I heard Mr Mashima’s voice from the loudspeaker.

“Well, now we will announce the ranking of the special exam. The lowest is Class C with 0 points.”

“Bwahahaha.. Look! I told you! No points at all! Laughable!”

As soon as he heard the results, Sudou laughed heartily holding his belly, ridiculing Ryuuen.

“0 points?”

Ryuuen didn't seem to understand the situation, he was rather in shock.

Mr Mashima continued with the announcement of the results without hesitation.

"Subsequently, in the 3rd

place is Class A with 120 points. Second place is Class B with 140 points."

A commotion broke out. They were rankings and points that no one had expected.

I wondered if it was because they couldn't hide their embarrassment about their mistake on the numbers they calculated.

"And Class D..."

Instantly, Mr Mashima's movements stiffened. However, his speech soon resumed.

".... Got first place with 225 points. This concludes the announcement of the test results."

The students of Class D, except for Hirata, were the most confused by this situation.

Even Hirata, just smiled excitedly, not being able to believe it either, even if he was the only person who was aware of the situation, beforehand.

"What is the meaning of this, Katsuragi?"

From the other side of the rest area, voices echoed, as the students of Class A encircled Katsuragi.

"Something is wrong... What do they mean with these results?"

"Yahoooooooo! We did it! This serves you right!"

Along with Sudou's screams, all students of Class D gathered together, at once.

"Hey.. Hey! What's that supposed to mean?!. Hey!"

Ike was full with excitement along with confusion, so he leaned towards Hirata, asking for an explanation.

"I will explain everything, over there. Well, then, Ryuuuen, we will excuse ourselves from here."

Leaving these suggestive words behind, Hirata set out on his way to the boat along with Ike and Sudou.

Sudou held up his middle finger while sticking out his tongue. Ryuuuen had no choice but to watch in silence.

The exam was over and the first year students scattered around. Two hours later, when the ship seemed ready to depart, we still played in the sea. We took our time to get on board feeling relaxed. I also began to walk, boarding the ship.

"Yo! Ladies and gentlemen. How was your week on the deserted island?"

On the deck of the ship, with a drink in one hand, Kouenji greeted Class D. "Kouenji, you jerk! Because of you, we lost 30 points, you know what am I talking about, right?

"Calm down, Ike boy. I was sick in bed, in bad condition. I had no other choice, right?

Shiny and glossy, I could tell that he tanned his skin spending the whole week on the ship. Also, saying these things while looking perfectly fine, gave you not even a fragment of persuasive power.

A little later than the moment when Kouenji was blamed all at once by the boys, Horikita showed up. She was still pale as if she hadn't been in good shape yet. The students who noticed the presence of Horikita gathered naturally around her.

"Su.. Suzune, are you feeling better, now?"

Sudou spoke hesitantly, but approached Horikita anyway, by calling her by her first name.

"Not too bad. I can't say that I am in perfect condition, yet. Above all, retiring was my big failure."

"Don't worry about it."

It seemed like Horikita accepted to be called by her first name, so naturally.

That was unexpected.

“By the way, Sudou. Do not call me Suzune without my permission, got it?”

“Oops... Understood.”

Apparently, she didn’t accept it. Sudou had no other choice but to bow in agreement.

“But what is the meaning of this? How did Class D get the 1st place?”

They had gained evidence of who was our leader, so I made Horikita retire. If I let this happen, in terms of calculation, I guess we would have been close to 0 points.

“That’s right. How did this happen Hirata! I do not get it, at all!”

Hirata is asked to give an appropriate answer, but there seemed to be something that needed to be solved before that.

“Well... Karuizawa. First of all, I think you have something to tell to Horikita, right?”

Having said that, he called out to Karuizawa who was hiding behind Shinohara.

Karuizawa after being called, approached Horikita, slowly.

“... Horikita, can I talk to you for a second, please?”

“Yes. There is something that you should talk about with me. Isn’t that right?”

Horikita closed her eyes as soon as she saw Karuizawa making a small nod in agreement.

Karuizawa answered about things like the underwear theft incident and about using our points selfishly and acknowledged that since the identity of our leader became known, Horikita had to retire.

In other words we had to accept her words, no matter what she had said before. That’s what her facial expression was telling us.

“I’m sorry.”

Karuizawa apologized, just a little bluntly but with a regretful expression on her face.

"It was Ibuki the one who stole my underwear. I heard it all about it from Ayanokouji."

"Eh?"

Horikita, who was prepared to be abused, was puzzled by an apology she did not expect about actions she did not remember.

"Horikita, you realized that Ibuki was the thief, and you questioned her, so she tried to escape, didn't she? I was told that this is the reason why you ended up sick."

Horikita turned to me, startled by Karuizawa's unexpected words.

Somehow I felt awkward and averted my gaze.

"And I heard it from Hirata first. He said that you, Horikita had seen through the leaders of Class A and Class C. That's why this time, our points were this high, s

o... I'm sorry for all the things I said."

Having said this, Karuizawa returned immediately close to the other girls.

"Wait a minute. I... found out about the other leaders, you say. But I retired."

"You do not have to be humble, Horikita. I am sure we had this result because your answers about the leaders were absolutely correct."

I felt the doubts rising up in Horikita's head.

About this enigmatic result on the test, I think it made sense to everyone but her, at least for the time being.

"Wait, Ayanokouji...What are you..."

Horikita tried to talk to me in the midst of the confusion and joy of many students.

However, Horikita, being the leader of this victorious test, was surrounded by our classmates at once.

“Horikita, you are really awesome! A true genius, right?!”

“When I heard that you retired, I was concerned about what would going to happen, but everything turned out to be okay.”

“Just, hold on a second!?”

As she was bombarded with questions from girls and boys, alike, I clasped my hands in prayer for the successful result and then I retreated.

Well, I was glad that it ended good. Our Class took first place and Horikita became popular. I guess, she could make it through, just fine. Meanwhile, I woule try not to get caught up by somebody else and rest in my room. Just when I thought so, I ended up meeting a death god, instead.

“Can I have a few words with you?”

“It is really a bad time for invitations. Ms Chabashira. May I refuse?”

“If you don’t want to, then I guess I’ll just start talking here. Is it okay with you if we attract attention?

“Because it’s hot, be brief please.”

I walked to the opposite side of the ship so that Ms Chabashira could take the lead. People were completely out of sight here. When there was silence I broached out the topic.

“Is it okay for me to think that you are satisfied with this for the time being?”

“Yeah. Firstly, let me say that it was admirable. Honestly, I was impressed.”

“Then tell me now, is it true that «that man» demanded that I drop out of school?”

Ms Chabashira leaned her back on the palisade and and looked up at the sky.

“.....Is there an actual basis that make you say that this story is true?”

“I know a lot more than you think about you. Don’t you think that’s enough basis? Other faculty members and teaching staff don’t know about your true abilities. But I have no doubt about them.”

Something else was in doubt. It was true that I did something that made me stand out for the entrance examination’s question, but none of the teaching

staff should have known about my insider knowledge. This time, the order of things will be amusing. Ms Chabashira said she had been in contact with that man recently. As expected, this person was hiding something.

"You've probably heard about the famous myth of the wings of Icarus."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Icarus flew away from the tower he occupied to gain freedom. But that didn't happen because of his own power as a person. It happened because his father Daedalus designed and constructed the wings and made them fly. He didn't fly because of his own intention or purpose. Don't you think this is the spitting image of you right now?"

"I don't understand."

"That man.....no, your father said this. Kiyotaka will choose the way and the road that, in the end, will make him drop out on his own. It means that your ending will be like Icarus'. The same Icarus who burned his wings flying too close to the sun. The same Icarus who fell into the ocean and died."

So that's what Icarus' wings is about.

"So what are you going to do now?"

"You should know, Ms. Icarus will continue not to follow Daedalus' advice."

Despite the burned wings, Icarus will continue to fly as much as he can.
Seeking freedom.

Epilogue II: The journey ends here

When I got inside the ship, I headed immediately back to my room. A tired Hirata was laying, sleeping in the room. I changed my clothes quietly to the corridor so as not to wake him up.

When I turned on the mobile phone, the electronic tone repeatedly ringed and the incoming call history was filled up. For the time being I would just answer the emails and then I waited in the lounge while taking a break.

She won't be satisfied unless I explained everything to her sooner or later.

Then, a few minutes later, an angry Horikita joined me, releasing a silent pressure upon me.

"What is the meaning of the test result? What on earth is going on?"

"You got an expression like you do not have the slightest idea"

"Yeah, I cannot comprehend it. I cannot comprehend it at all. There are a lot of things I want to ask you"

Horikita ordered drinks to the barman who was standing right in front of us. I began talking without waiting for her reaction.

"I'll tell you everything. However, the minimum condition is that you stay silent on this matter. I won't compromise, otherwise"

I anticipated that it would come to this situation, since Horikita didn't want to retire on her own will. It was a story that should be kept secret, or rather, Horikita would be the only one obtaining these information.

"Where do you want to begin with?"

"What were you doing on this test? Tell me about it"

It was a much better question than I expected. In brief, she wanted to know everything, at once.

"When this special examination was announced, I didn't pay attention to anything but the additional rules. How to manage 300 points was pretty much a

simple task and not something that you could manipulate personally.”

“But the additional rules were very difficult to follow.”

“Even if you followed them religiously, you still wouldn’t be able to identify the leaders. Right?”

“Indeed. So first of all, I raised my hand and volunteered to search for a base camp. I planned to search spot by spot so I could get ahead of everyone else and have the freedom to act when needed.”

“To put it simply, so that no one else could have known the position of the spots”

“That’s not the case. You didn’t understand because you were feeling sick already, but the school already gave you clues about possible spots while the ship was still sailing”

Katsuragi was also aware of this, but when he told her that the ship was circling the island at an unnatural high-speed, Horikita silenced him. It was nearly three times faster than a usual cruise ship. Moreover, if it was just for sightseeing, it was quite unusual to talk about «An important scenery» in the announcement.

At that time I didn’t fully understand what I was looking at, but Kouenji had already noticed that hint.

Well, it was a waste of time thinking about Kouenji, now.

“When, I reached the cave I thought that it was the best base with the most important location”

“The cave as the best base? Don’t you think that rivers and water wells would have been more convenient, though?

“It’s not the spot itself that matters. But where it is located”

There were no spots close to the water well or the river. On the contrary, there were two spots prepared connected to the cave, a cabin and a tower. In other words, it was a great place to use as headquarters. Horikita seemed to show a certain level of understanding while I was explaining it.

“But what is the advantage that you’ve got in the cave, when you don’t have

the key-card?"

"Well, I intended to explore various things, but it turned out that I find out the true identity of the leader"

"Katsuragi was so careless that he made you realise that he is the leader"

That's not the case, not really.

"There was a guy called Yahiko, right? The guy who always follows Katsuragi. That guy was the leader. I saw Katsuragi and Yahiko close to the cave but I didn't see them clearly in that moment to confirm that they were indeed the ones that occupied it. I was sure they were occupying the cave after they left."

I will explain the situation of that time again. The moment I saw them, Katsuragi, was standing at the entrance, carrying the key-card. Yahiko, who came out of the cave, joined him and they left together.

"So, by looking at this sight, wouldn't be natural to mistake Katsuragi as the leader?"

"Really? Do you think that a leader would show the key-card in such a careless way, in public?"

Because Horikita was the leader, I could understand how foolish she was and that she wouldn't be able to carry out that role.

"But why?... Why bother to have the card in his hand?"

"Because he had to do so. Katsuragi is a calm, composed and extremely cautious man as far as I examined. There is no reason he didn't understand the high risk of occupying such a spot as soon as they found it. In other words, the one who occupied it was the one who was caught in the act of immediate greed."

"That... Requires the presence of another person"

"So it seems. When he found the cave, Katsuragi, didn't intend to occupy it, but he kept it all to himself, which may have been due to the fact that Yahiko had taken possession of it beforehand by a mistake. He was thinking that nobody was watching, yet, he insured himself just in case. By standing around holding the key-card in his hands, he thought that he could mislead any possible

witnesses that he was the leader”

“A class had two spots except for their base, but I didn’t know exactly how many spots they occupied in the end of the test. If I just guessed their leader, all their points could be invalidated”

Well, it was a waste of time to devote myself to it when I had narrowed it down to Yahiko.

“I’m not quite convinced. If he had marked such a spot at an early stage, wouldn’t it be easy to avoid such trouble if he used help from his classmates? It would have been a sufficient claim on his right of possession that it would have allowed him to keep a watchful eye upon the cave. Why occupy it, exclusively...”

“That’s the disadvantage of A class”

Their overall score for the test is high and they haven’t received a negative assessment in overall class attitude like D class. However, their class is divided internally. In other words, there was a reason why he couldn’t use help from a large group of people.

“Their class, which looks perfect on the surface, has now a big hole in it”

That’s why I pierced through A class so easily, this time. Well, it was just luck. A kind of score that was obtained by exploiting a mistake. It’s like A class had no way of beating an unguarded raid over their head.

“So, at this stage, I excluded A class, and I turned my attention to C class’s movements. Katsuragi was an easy-to-understand type, but there was quite an unknown quality about Ryuuken. In fact, he was gathering more information than I was, and he saw through the leaders of all the classes”

“Wai...wait. He was able to see through all the classes. Not only D class, He knew B class and A class leaders too. But that’s odd. Aside from receiving a penalty, we were ranked first by a large margin. How are you going to explain this?”

“Although this story is a little hard to explain, the answer to that question is the reason I made you retire”

“Retire...the answer...What the heck did you do?”

“Oh, didn’t you return it to the school yet?”

I took out a card from my pocket and handed it to Horikita.

“This is a key-card. Why do you.....”

Horikita was surprised to see the letters carved on that card.

“Why, this is....”

The letters engraved on the card were «Ayanokouji Kyotaka».

“The trial must be fair. That’s why all the rules are created fair”

That’s quite natural. It’s something that can be seen clearly in the additional rules. Only one leader can be chosen. The leader can’t change. In other words, the leader is the only one who has the right of exclusive possession.

“What do you think would happen if the leader retired because sick?”

“That’s.....The leader will be absent. So the right of exclusive possession will also disappear”

“You’re wrong. In the manual, it was written like this: «The leader cannot be changed without a legitimate reason». Don’t you think that «retirement» is a valid enough reason?”

The only way through which additional rules could be broken is if the leader is in a poor physical condition or if he or she has been injured. I could predict the we would need to find a new leader.

I was able to discover this by looking and analyzing the other rules. For example, it’s established that a base camp cannot be changed without a justifiable reason, but even here the reason was valid enough.

For example, when we were occupying the river side we were unprepared for something like another class taking our spot, and so this applied for a «justifiable reason» to occupy. You won’t be able to stay at the base camp itself, so if there’s no arrangement and no plan to find a new base camp, you will collapse.

“Then, you, to me.....”

A leader named Horikita Suzune retired and at her place I found myself in her

place. Of course, the leader guessed at the end of the exam should have been me. There's only one leader.

"That's also the reason C class knew that and we didn't receive any damage"

"But wait. Even though Ibuki stole my card, if I had thoroughly protected it....."

Horikita recalled what happened on the day of the accident.

"Did you drop the card on purpose in that occasion? Well, maybe also Yamauchi's action gave way for Ibuki to prepare an opportunity to steal the key-card ——"

I was holding the muddy Horikita and I had no choice but to give up the key-card.

"I couldn't do anything..not knowing what was Ibuki aiming at from the start....."

Right. I mean a girl named Ibuki was suddenly found and picked up by D class.

Firstly, it was necessary for us to know such a thing would be strange.

However, I was almost convinced when I heard a story about a boy called Kaneda who has been helped in the same way by B class. He was a spy sent in by Ryuuen. It wasn't pleasant to hear that two people were helped by two different classes, all by chance. And it wasn't pleasant to know that they were believed to be genuine.

"Furthermore, Ibuki has the habit of looking in a person's eyes when speaking and lying"

The bigger the lie, the more strikingly obvious this habit became.

"When you tell a lie, you look in the eyes of a person....Isn't that normal?"

"Generally speaking, when you have a guilty conscience, you will avoid eye contact. But she's the other way round. I think she talks with eye contact because she wants you to think that the lie is actually the truth. So maybe the person talking with her wouldn't have noticed anything"

Even when the story of the underwear thief came out, she kept talking

looking at me in the eyes.

“Perhaps, she only had the goal of searching high and low for a key-card, and after that her goal changed to simply disturb D class”

What happened to Karuizawa and what was in Ike’s bag should only be seen as a mere coincidences.

“But I wonder why Ibuki specifically steal my key-card. If it was only to confirm my name, she still didn’t understand anything”

“At first, she was supposed to. But an unforeseen trouble happened”

Then that has triggered to founding out C class leader.

“Ibuki had prepared a digital camera in her bag. Probably because she was supposed to shoot the key-card”

“To shoot.....with a digital camera.....Why has she gone to such extent?”

“If there was a picture, maybe the existence of the leader would have been clear for everyone to see? She reached a conviction that for the first time she would get profit”

“Well I don’t know....Maybe Ryuuken didn’t trust Ibuki?”

“That’s not it. If this kind of talk only got around in C class, then there would be no need to shoot with a digital camera or to steal it”

In other words, Ibuki is a person who doesn’t trust easily what other people say, so she wanted a reliable evidence.

“There’s no evidence of that though. Listen, I’m just thinking that my prediction derived from the result of the trial. At the end of this test, A class had 270 points”

In other words, that meant that they didn’t even use 1 point during the exam.

“C class and A class were both connected and in contact behind the scenes and C class sacrificed their points to buy what was necessary for A class. In addition, by transferring to A class all the tools used by C class, A class was able to spend a week here without using points. I think that’s about it”

An extension of this connection was that Ibuki obtained the evidence and

spilled the information to someone in A class.

“By the way, the realization that I’m C class’ leader came after half of the students had retired. It was certain that someone who remained on the island from the students will become a leader, right?”

“Even so, we weren’t supposed to know who remained in the morning.”

“Nah, I was about 100% sure Ryuuен stayed on the island”

I realized this when I came across Ibuki hiding a transceiver that was buried in the ground. It was used so that Ryuuен could stay in contact with Ibuki. Retired students couldn’t be using a transceiver. It became a proof that someone must have certainly stayed on the island in order to use it.

Actually, the transceiver was carelessly laid on the table while he was enjoying the vacation. No one else was controlling it but he himself. It was his mistake that he hadn’t trusted anyone.

“Really... I have no words”

Horikita answered, facing the truth. If I were to recap this trial in my way, A class didn’t function well due to internal division in addition to their first mistake that ended up haunting them until the end.

B class carried out a thorough defense-oriented trial that did neither harm nor good. That’s right. But the sole mistake was that they forgave the existence of Kaneda in a group since there were a lot of credulous and gullible people. Then, about my theory. I’m not sure how it was carried out, but Kaneda told Ryuuен he acquired the proof, even though he couldn’t get any physical evidence once he saw that A class wasn’t obtaining points.

Then, C class. With me becoming the leader we managed to avoid damage at last but, besides feeding the spies and pulling off the stunt of realizing all classes’ leaders, we were supposed to obtain an advantage with A class due to negotiation of some kind. One person we should have been on guard the most was probably Ryuuен.

“I’m not happy. You used me as a foal in a terrible way”

“Indeed. I can’t deny that. I wouldn’t be surprised even if you say you won’t

come near me ever again”

I was self-conscious of that.

“Well, I’m going back to the room. I’m still tired”

“Wait. We didn’t finish talking here”

“What? I also want to rest in the room as much as possible”

“Once you explain to me everything. We still have things to discuss”

“Well... What is it?

“The reason of you challenging this special trial. Was it to compete alone or use me – it’s okay if you tell now. I want to know the reason of you, who wouldn’t rock a boat, joining this trial”

“... I see.”

Maybe the explanation until now wasn’t so important for Horikita.

“You were great at realizing things quickly without suspicion at this occasion. Since you lent your hand to us, aiming at A class became fully realistic. However, what was the principle of your action? Why did you do that?”

Still, I wasn’t bothered telling my personal problem to Horikita because I only did it to pull out of the promise from Chabashira sensei this time.

“It’s because I was impressed by you. You were trying to fight to the bitter end alone in a bad condition.”

“... You don’t say often lies that are easy to see through”

“I’m in no mood for explaining”

I stood up from the chair and held out my hand.

“I don’t mind if you help me advancing to A class. But there’s one condition – do not investigate me. If you promise not to touch me under any terms next time, I’ll help you out”

As if wanting to check what would happen next, Horikita took my hand with no hesitation.

“If you don’t want to tell me that’s fine. There’s no reason to refuse a lent

hand without prying. I have no interest digging up something that's peacefully lying in the past."

Horikira shook my hand firmly.

I am for me. You are for you.

The battle of rising this class from the rock bottom was just about to get started.



RINNE

GREETINGS MY DEAR READERS

MY LOVE FOR THE SERIES IS WHAT STARTED THIS PROJECT. AT THAT TIME, I WAS THINKING OF HAVING MY TRANSLATORS DOING SOMETHING ELSE OTHER THAN HELPING WITH INTERVIEWS. DAYS BEFORE, I FINISHED WATCHING THE YOJITSU ANIME. I THINK IT'S PRETTY OKAY THOUGH OBVIOUSLY IT IS PRIMARILY THERE SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROMOTING THE SOURCE MATERIAL WHICH IN THIS CASE IS A LIGHT NOVEL. THAT DROVE ME TO WANDER AROUND THE INTERNET IN SEARCH OF THE LIGHT NOVEL TO READ AND I WAS SURPRISED TO SEE IT WASN'T LICENSED FOR ENGLISH RELEASE. FOUND OUT ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF NOVELUPDATES JUST A FEW HOURS LATER AND REALIZED THAT THE TRANSLATION FOR THE NOVEL STOPPED AT VOLUME 2 (IT'S NOT EVEN COMPLETED).

AS A TEAM LEADER, LOTS OF THINGS CAME TO MIND AT THAT TIME BUT ONE THING THAT SURPASSED ALL OF MY DESIRES IS TO HAVE THE TEAM PICK THIS NOVEL UP AND TRANSLATE IT FOR THE FANBASE. SINCE THEN, WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS CONSTANTLY DESPITE MANY SETBACKS. WE ARE NEW TO THIS, BUT IT WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE REGARDLESS. WE'VE LEARNED SO MANY THINGS TOGETHER AND TO DIRECTLY ENGAGE WITH THE FANBASE IS SOMETHING THAT I WILL CHERISH FOREVER. IN MY OPINION, THE YOJITSU FANBASE IS EASILY THE BEST OUT OF THE BUNCH. SUPPORTIVE, HELPFUL, AND KINDHEARTED. THERE IS NO SUPERLATIVE ENOUGH TO DESCRIBE MY GRATEFULNESS TOWARDS THE FANBASE THAT NEVER STOPS BELIEVING IN US. GUYS, IT WAS ONE HELL OF A JOURNEY. SINCERELY.

FOR MY TEAM MEMBERS THAT HAVE BEEN SUCH GREAT COMRADES FROM START TO FINISH. WE'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT. ALL OF THEM ARE BUSY PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE, ACHIEVING FEATS THERE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME STILL A GRACEFUL COLLEAGUE WHILE WORKING TOGETHER. SHOUTOUT TO BLACK_MIRI (STUCK WITH ME FROM THE START UNTIL NOW), MASAYUME, AND TOKPOANDBEYOND. THESE THREE PEOPLE ARE GOAT. I DON'T DESERVE THEM. BUT THEY DESERVE ALL THE APPLAUSE AND PRAISE FROM ME AND FROM YOU GUYS.

IT IS VERY SAD THAT WE HAVE TO END OUR JOURNEY WITH YOJITSU LIGHT NOVEL HERE. WE ALL LOVE IT. THE CHARACTERS ARE WELL-WRITTEN. THEIR MONOLOGUES AND DIALOGUES ARE INTRIGUING. THE PREMISE IS SOLID BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY AYANOKOUI KIYOTAKA IS A GREAT MAIN CHARACTER AS A FOCUS AND ALSO TO CARRY THE STORY. SIMPLY, WE JUST LOVE IT AND IT'S FUN TO TRANSLATE A GREAT STORY. KUDOS TO KINUGASA FOR INTRODUCING YOJITSU TO US. SENSEI HAS BEEN GOOD AND CONSISTENT WITH HIS WRITING. THAT'S A GOOD ENOUGH QUALITY TO ATTRACT MORE READERS TO FOLLOW THIS LIGHT NOVEL. FINGERS CROSSED THOUGH, I HOPE HE'LL COME UP WITH A VERY SATISFYING ENDING FOR THE SERIES. NOT TO DEMEAN THEM BUT JAPANESE WRITERS TEND TO WRITE BADLY WRITTEN ENDINGS.

ENOUGH WITH THAT, THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE WILL STOP TRANSLATING LIGHT NOVEL, WE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE TRANSLATING BUT THIS TIME IT IS FOR A DIFFERENT NOVEL. HINT: IT'S KIND OF RELATED TO YOJITSU AND IS SOMEWHAT ALWAYS BEING BROUGHT UP IN DISCUSSIONS. OTHER THAN THAT, WE ALSO SCANLATE. ACTUALLY WE DO ACCEPT SCANLATION REQUESTS. JUST LEAVE IT IN COMMENTS AND WE'LL CONSIDER IT. I'M KIND OF SURPRISED THAT NONE OF OUR READERS TRIED TO DO THAT. OFC WE CAN'T TAKE MANY MANGA AT ONCE SINCE MOST OF OUR TRANSLATORS ARE BUSY IN REAL LIFE AND THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH THEY CAN DO. BUT WE WILL ALL ALWAYS TRY OUR VERY BEST.

I'M NOT MISSING ANYTHING RIGHT? HOPEFULLY I DIDN'T. A FEW LAST WORDS FOR EVERYONE, KEEP ON SUPPORTING OUR BLOG AS THE SATISFACTION FROM BEING APPRECIATED AND SUPPORTED DRIVE US TO CONTINUE CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. WE TAKE PLEASURE IN HELPING PEOPLE. THANK YOU, LOVE YOU ALL~



TOKPOPANDBEYOND

HELLO OH BLOG READERS! THIS IS TOKPOPANDBEYOND.

SINCE, WE HAVE REACHED THE CONCLUSION OF VOLUME 1, LET ME SHARE A FEW OF MY THOUGHTS WITH YOU. WHAT A JOURNEY IT WAS. REALLY, I KEPT MYSELF AWAY FROM SPOILERS AND READ THE PLOT WHILE TRANSLATING THE NEXT PART. I WILL DEFINITELY MISS AYANOKOUI AND THE GANG AND I AM SURE THE WHOLE TEAM WOULD LOVE TO CONTINUE TRANSLATING THIS SERIES BUT SINCE THE LIGHT NOVELS HAVE BEEN LICENSED WE ARE OBLIGED TO DROP THE PROJECT. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT SO FAR, I HOPE YOU ENJOYED READING THIS VOLUME AND HOPING TO SEE YOU AGAIN ON OUR NEXT TRANSLATION PROJECT. :)



MASAYUME

TRANSLATING A VOLUME FROM CLASSROOM OF THE ELITE WAS AN HONOR AND JOURNEY FOR A JAPANESE LEARNER LIKE ME WHO BRAVELY TOOK THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING A LIGHT NOVEL DESPITE BEING AN INEXPERIENCED TRANSLATOR AT THE TIME. WITH AYANOKOUI, HORIKITA AND THE REST OF THE CLASSROOM CREW I MANAGED TO LAUGH, CRY, LEARN AND GROW WITH EACH NEW CHAPTER, WHICH RESULTED IN ME BECOMING PACKED AND LEVELED-UP WITH NEW KNOWLEDGE THAT WON'T BE FORGOTTEN EVEN LONG AFTER FINISHING 300 PAGES OF THIS VOLUME, EVEN THOUGH I LACK IN MANY AREAS, I WILL WORK HARD IN ORDER TO ALWAYS SHOW A NEW, IMPROVED SELF IN MANY TRANSLATIONS THAT ARE ABOUT TO COME IN FRONT OF YOU... THINGS LIKE THAT. DON'T FORGET TO READ, FOLLOW AND SHARE EVERY NEW CONTENT OH PRESS DELIVER, CAUSE WE SURE DELIVER SOME GOOD-QUALITY STUFF.. ALRIGHT? UNTIL THE NEXT TRANSLATION PROJECT - MATA NE!



BLACK_MIRI

WHEN I FIRST STARTED TRANSLATING THIS LIGHT NOVEL I WAS THE ONLY JAPANESE TRANSLATOR ON THE PRESS TEAM AND I'M NOT GOING TO LIE I WAS FEELING A BIT INTIMIDATED BY THIS NEW IMPORTANT PROJECT. "WILL I BE GOOD ENOUGH? WILL MY LEVEL OF JAPANESE BE ENOUGH TO TRANSLATE SUCH A WORK THAT SEEMED SO INTRICATE AND DIFFICULT?" I CONSTANTLY ASKED MYSELF THESE QUESTIONS. I DIDN'T KNOW THE NOVEL VERY WELL EITHER (ONLY ITS ANIME VERSION) SO I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO BECOME EXTREMELY CHALLENGING FOR ME ALONE TO GO AHEAD WITH THIS PROJECT. THEN SUDDENLY I JUST LAUNCHED MYSELF IN THE PROJECT. I STARTED TRANSLATING UNKNOWINGLY AND THANKS TO THE HELP OF THE TENACIOUS YUME AND THE RESOURCEFUL PENNY, NOT TO MENTION OUR WONDERFUL CAPTAIN RINNE AND MANY OTHER EDITORS, WE MANAGED TO GIVE SHAPE, LITTLE BY LITTLE, TO AYANOKOUI'S JOURNEY ON THE ISLAND.

NOW I DON'T WANT TO BE A SAP NOR I WANT TO BE OVERLY EMOTIONAL BUT I WILL ALWAYS LOOK AT THIS WORK LIKE IT'S MY CHILD. I KNOW IT'S AN ODD METAPHOR BUT I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT, APART FROM BEING MY FIRST BIG PROJECT IN OHPRESS TEAM, I SAW, I WITNESSED ALL OF ITS STAGES. I SAW HOW IT'S BEEN CONCEIVED AND ITS FIRST STEPS, HOW IT'S BEEN NURTURED AND CARED FOR, HOW IT HAD ITS UPS AND DOWNS AND HOW IT GREW UP... I DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS BETTER THE DEEP GRATITUDE I FEEL TOWARDS OUR READERS WHO BELIEVED IN US AND FOLLOWED THE NOVEL TILL THE VERY END. I KNOW THAT WITHOUT YOU, READERS, NOTHING OF THIS COULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE. AND IT'S REALLY BITTERSWEET NOW TO SAY OUR FAREWELL. WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING BUT WATCH THIS EXPERIENCE FROM AFAR WITH A TEARY EYE AND A SMILING HEART, THANKFUL FOR THE JOURNEY THAT ALLOWED US TO GROW UP AS TRANSLATORS AND AS PERSONS.